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Sir Robert Cecil and Elizabethan  
Intelligencing, 1590-1603

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## Abstract

Much scholarly attention has been given to the development of Sir Francis Walsingham's intelligence-gathering network and how it played an important role in Elizabethan foreign and domestic politics during the 1580s, but little has been attempted for the 1590s. This thesis will argue that the practices and methods that Walsingham laid down did not completely dissipate after his death but in fact continued to be adhered to, most notably in the person of Sir Robert Cecil. It was Cecil who, more than any other Elizabethan in high authority, looked to create his own intelligence-gathering network as he foresaw the benefits of doing so. However, this transition was by no means straightforward, and in fact it can be seen as disjointed.

The thesis will also show that the rise of Cecil's intelligence-gathering network became intertwined with the rise of his political career. It was not until he became principal secretary in July 1596 that the creation of his own network could really proceed apace. The make-up and construction of his intelligence-gathering network will be discussed, as will the backgrounds of the people who worked for Cecil: his secretaries, his agents and message carriers. In sum, it will be shown that Sir Robert Cecil created by 1603 an effective intelligence-gathering network that was put to good use in the final years of Elizabeth's reign and continued into that of James I.

### Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to express my gratitude to both Dr Neil Younger and Prof. Ole Peter Grell for their excellent supervision and support during my Ph.D. studies. Their guidance, helpful suggestions, and patience have been greatly appreciated; I have learned so much from them both. I would also like to thank the librarians at the British Library for answering my enquiries and helping me to locate source material. I am also indebted to the Tudor and Stuart seminars held at the IHR in London for their welcoming support and suggested avenues of enquiry to pursue. I am also grateful to them for allowing me to present a paper at one of their seminars, whose feedback helped enormously in the completion of this thesis.

My greatest gratitude goes to my dad and brother who have had to put up with me talking about Cecil, agents, ciphers and much more for the last four years and for supporting me throughout not just my Ph.D. studies but for the whole of my university studies. This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my mum who had always actively encouraged me to pursue my love of history to see how far it would take me.

## Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
Author's Declaration	5
Notes on Dates	6
Abbreviations	7-8
Introduction	9-26
Chapter 1: Robert Cecil's education and early political career, 1563-1588	27-43
Chapter 2: Robert Cecil's early intelligence career, 1590-1593	44-64
Chapter 3: The Plots of 1593-1595	65-101
Chapter 4: Cecil's appointment as Principal Secretary and the False Spanish Armadas 1595-1597	102-128
Chapter 5: The fear of the Invisible Armada 1599	129-154
Chapter 6: Sir Robert Cecil and the Elizabethan Succession	155-187
Chapter 7: Sir Robert Cecil's Methodology as an Intelligencer	188-225
Conclusion	226-236
Appendix: Tables of Cecil's Agents and Secretarial Staff	237-241
Bibliography	242-252

### Author's Declaration

I, Christopher Mains, hereby certify that this doctoral thesis, which is 91,736 words in length (including footnotes), is my own work. I also declare that this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree to any other University or Institution.

### Note on Dates

Dates are given in Old Style but with the year assumed to have begun on 1 January. In the case of documents sent from abroad, both dates are given.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Stephen Alford, *The Watchers: A Secret History of the Reign of Elizabeth I*, (London 2012), pp. xiv-xv.

### Abbreviations

APC	J.R. Dascent, E.G. Atkinson, et al, (eds), <i>Acts of the privy council of England, new series</i> , (46 vols., London, 1891-92)
BL	British Library
CSPD	R. Lemon and M.A.E. Green (eds.), <i>Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series of the reign of Elizabeth I</i> (12 vols [for 1547-1625], 1856-72)
CSPF	J. Stevenson, A. Crosby, et al., (eds.) <i>Calendar of State Papers Foreign, of the reign of Elizabeth I</i> (23 vols., London, 1863-1950)
CSPScot	Joseph Bain, J.D. Mackie, et al, (eds.), <i>Calendar of State Papers Relating to Scotland, and Mary, Queen of Scots</i> , (13 vols, London, 1898-1969)
CSP Ire	Hans Claude Hamilton, et al., (eds.) <i>Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, of the reign of Elizabeth I</i> , (13 vols. 1860-1912)
CSPD	Mary Everett Green (ed.), <i>Calendars of State Papers, Domestic, James I, 1603-1625</i> , (4 vols, London, 1857-59)
CJRC	John Bruce (ed.), <i>Correspondence of King James of Scotland with Sir Robert Cecil and Others in England</i> , Camden Society 78, First Series (1861)
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
Foljambe MSS	<i>The Manuscripts of the Right Honourable F. J. Saville Foljambe of</i>



	<i>Osberton</i> , vol. 15, (London, 1897)
<i>HR</i>	<i>Historical Research</i>
<i>HMC</i>	<i>Historical Manuscripts Commission</i>
<i>HMCS</i>	M.S. Giuseppi et al. (eds.), <i>Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Honourable the Marquis of Salisbury</i> (24 vols, HMC, 1888-1976)
<i>HMCD</i>	<i>De L'Isle and Dudley</i> C.L. Kingsford and William Shaw, (eds), Historical Manuscripts Commission, Report on the Manuscripts of Lord De L'Isle and Dudley, preserved at Penshurst Place, Vol. 2, (London, 1934-42)
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>State Papers</i>
<i>TCHR</i>	<i>The Catholic Historical Review</i>
<i>CRS</i>	<i>Catholic Record Society</i>
<i>THJ</i>	<i>The Historical Journal</i>
<i>TRHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
<i>List and analysis</i>	R.B Wernham (ed), <i>List and analysis of State Papers, Foreign Series, Elizabeth I, 1589-1596</i> , 7 vols., (London, 1964).

## Introduction

In the spring of 1594, Francis Bacon wrote a short document entitled 'Memorandum on the Queen's Safety' in which he set down his 'principall remedies ... for the extirpating the principall cause of those conspiracies by breaking of the nest of those fugitive traytors and the fillinge them full of terror dispayre jealousy and revolt'.<sup>2</sup> His main concern was that there was a perceived lack of interest in the gathering of good intelligence on the queen's enemies in recent years. Bacon reasoned that if it were made known that the queen had a formidable intelligence network then her enemies would 'growe into such a mutuall jealousy and suspicion one of another as they will not have the confydence to Conspyre together, not knowing whome to trust'.<sup>3</sup> Bacon concluded his section on intelligence gathering by explaining to the current privy council that 'it is not doone with that glory and note of the world w[hi]ch was in Mr Secretary Walsinghams tyme'.<sup>4</sup> Sir Francis Walsingham had died in April 1590 and had been viewed as the quintessential spy master through his thwarting of the Throckmorton plot in 1583 and the entrapment of Mary Queen of Scots in 1586.<sup>5</sup> This harking back to Walsingham's tenure among the higher echelons of Elizabethan nobility can again be seen in a letter five years later in 1599 when William Lambarde (Justice of the Peace for Kent) wrote to his friend Sir John Leveson (deputy lieutenant of Kent under William Brooke, Lord Cobham) in the aftermath of the standing down of the militia after the 1599 'invisible' armada scare. Lambarde bemoaned that 'the ghost of Syr Fra. Walsingham groaneth to see Ingland bared of a serviceable intelligencer'.<sup>6</sup> Even at the start of the 1590s there was a genuine fear from among

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<sup>2</sup> Francis Bacon, *Memorandum on the Queen's Safety* (1594), cited in Alan Stewart and Harriet Knight (eds.), *Early Writings, 1584-1596* (The Oxford Francis Bacon I, Oxford 2012), pp. 503-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 503-4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 503-4

<sup>5</sup> Conyers Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham and the policy of Elizabeth I*, (Oxford, 1925).

<sup>6</sup> William Lambarde to John Leveson, 1 September 1599, accessed via The Sutherland Collection, Staffordshire & Stoke on Trent Archive Service: <https://www.search.sutherlandcollection.org.uk/details.aspx?ResourceID=1457&ExhibitionPage=5&ExhibitionID=1481&PageIndex=1&KeyWord=lambarde&DateFrom=0&DateTo=2019&SortOrder=0&ThemeID=0> accessed on 01/02/2019.

those in the privy council that the naval dockyards may come under attack. This can be seen in a brief note from Charles, Lord Howard, of Effingham to William Brooke, Lord Cobham in January 1590, whereby, on receiving disturbing intelligence that the navy dockyards at Chatham may be targeted, he asked Cobham in his role as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports to 'order that the beacons therabout maie be watched and looked unto' and that 'if anie suspected person doe hange loitering therabout he may be staied and apprehended'.<sup>7</sup> Based on just these few examples, there was a perception among the governing elite and nobility that there was a dearth of quality intelligence being gathered to inform the queen and her privy council of the potential threats they faced in the post-Walsingham era.

Placed within this context, the intelligence gathering network that Sir Robert Cecil was to build up, especially after he became the queen's principal secretary in July 1596, was of the utmost importance. Cecil's intelligence network also deserves scholarly attention as it can tell us much about the 1590s that has hitherto been under-researched or is just beginning to be better understood by historians. In the first instance, it can inform us more about Cecil himself, in that the growth of his intelligence gathering network was inextricably tied to the furthering of his political career. For example, without his appointment as principal secretary, as master of the court of wards and his other offices after 1596, he would not have had the finance or the prestige to fund his intelligence networks nor to attract the agents or the secretaries which he relied upon. In the same vein, his intelligence work added to the perception of his importance to the queen and among his fellow councillors and thus furthered his career. Looking at Cecil's intelligence networks can also tell historians a lot about the political narrative of the last decade of Elizabeth I's reign, such as the progress of his career alongside that of Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, his relationship with his father, his increasing interaction with the queen

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<sup>7</sup> Lord Howard of Effingham to Lord Cobham, [January 1590], Sutherland Collection, Staffordshire & Stoke on Trent Archive, <https://www.search.sutherlandcollection.org.uk/Details.aspx?&ResourceID=492&PageIndex=1&KeyWord=intelligence&DateFrom=1500&DateTo=1603&SortOrder=0&ThemeID=0> accessed 15/07/19.

and his ability to work effectively alongside other members of the Elizabethan government and bureaucracy.

The period under discussion in this thesis – 1590-1603 – was a crucial time during the war between protestant England and catholic Spain, with English forces fighting on three fronts: in the Low Countries, France and Ireland.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, it stands to reason that the Elizabethan state needed accurate intelligence on troop movements, dispositions, morale and possible tactics that the Spanish and rebel Irish armies would use against them. This is where Cecil and his agents came into their own, infiltrating enemy camps or using their previous experience in the service as soldiers to aid Elizabeth's armies in defeating their enemies. Cecil's intelligence contacts were also important with regard to the succession, particularly in keeping track of the different claimants who could potentially take the throne from Cecil's eventual preferred candidate, James VI of Scotland. The ever present threat from the Jesuit order and the English catholic emigrés were just as prevalent during the 1590s as it had been in the 1580s, as will be seen by the plots during 1593-95 which are discussed below.

With the level of importance of Cecil's intelligence network being thus established, it is perhaps somewhat surprising that there has been little work on this subject. For example, a recent book entitled *Diplomacy and Early Modern Culture* (2011), edited by Robyn Adams and Rosanna Cox, contains no mention of Cecil as a cultivator of intelligence gathering. There are only mentions of his father William Cecil, Lord Burghley, Walsingham and Essex in this regard in articles by Stephen Alford and Adams respectively.<sup>9</sup> Sebastian Sobecki has also highlighted the travels of John Peyton through central Europe as an example of how Cecil used these

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<sup>8</sup> For a more in depth discussion of the warfare conducted in this period see R.B. Wernham, *The Return of the Armadas: The Last Years of the Elizabethan War Against Spain, 1595-1603* (Oxford, 1994, reprinted 2002); Paul Hammer, *Elizabeth's Wars: War, Government and Society, 1544-1603* (Basingstoke, 2003) esp. chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>9</sup> See Stephen Alford, 'Some Elizabethan Spies in the Office of Sir Francis Walsingham', in Robyn Adams and Rosanna Cox (eds.) *Diplomacy in Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke, 2011) pp. 46-62; Robyn Adams, 'A Most Secret Service: William Herle and the Circulation of Intelligence', *Early Modern Culture*, pp. 63-81.

men to provide him with intelligence and information on a country where his spread of agents were considerably lacking.<sup>10</sup>

In spite of this, there has been an increase in the recent historiography of intelligence gathering during the Elizabethan period. The first modern work to deal with this subject in detail was Conyers Read's three-volume work on Sir Francis Walsingham that put his role as an effective spymaster and the agents that he employed at the forefront of England's fight to protect itself from its enemies both from within and abroad. It also highlighted the importance of the role of the principal secretary, which allowed Walsingham to build his intelligence networks by bringing together a household of individuals, such as Thomas Phelippes, who were integral to the smooth running of his intelligence network and without whom the Babington plot (and others) would not have been foiled so successfully.<sup>11</sup> Further work by the late John Bossy in his *Giordano Bruno and the Embassy Affair* and his follow up *Under the Molehill: An Elizabethan Spy Story* carry on from Read's work. Importantly for this study, he shed light on the inner workings of intelligence networks during the 1580s and raised the question of whether Walsingham, Burghley and the queen were 'not so much discovering facts as inventing them: promoting and nurturing sham plots, eliciting phoney confession, tampering with evidence.' Bossy argued that the intelligence gathered by Walsingham did report on real goings-on but that the information gathered did also have a specific goal in mind (which was to halt the catholic mission and to implicate Mary Queen of Scots) and to achieve that end the circumstances that would enable a plot of this type had to be created.<sup>12</sup> Alford and Cooper, however, have shown that through both the tampering of Babington's letter to Mary by Thomas Phelippes (Walsingham's cryptographer) and Burghley allowing the death warrant to be

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<sup>10</sup> Sebastian Sobecki, "'A man of curious enquiry': John Peyton's Grand Tour to central Europe and Robert Cecil's intelligence network, 1596-1601", *Renaissance Studies*, 29 (2015), pp. 394-410.

<sup>11</sup> Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol 3, pp. 13-27.

<sup>12</sup> John Bossy, *Under the Molehill: An Elizabethan Spy Story* (London, 2001) pp. 139- 142.

delivered without the queen's knowledge, that this plot had at least partly been staged managed by Walsingham and Burghley.<sup>13</sup>

Other works such as R.B Wernham's three books on Elizabethan foreign policy, Susan Doran and Paulina Kewes' edited volume on the Elizabethan succession and John Guy's recent biography of Elizabeth entitled *Elizabeth: The Forgotten Years* have all mentioned that intelligence gathering was a tool used by the English privy council to gather information about their enemies and influence foreign policy, but none of these works has looked at this topic in depth and the influence that it had has been side-lined to some extent.<sup>14</sup> Paul Hammer's *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, which focussed on the life and career of Robert Devereux, second earl of Essex, devoted a chapter to the agents that Essex used to gather intelligence to further his own political influence within the court. Within this chapter, Hammer also illustrates some facets of the intelligence network set up by Burghley and coordinated by Cecil, especially in Scotland, and the cooperation between the supposed rivals in pooling the information that they had gathered from their respective networks.<sup>15</sup>

Two works that have highlighted the importance of espionage during the 1580s are Stephen Alford's book *The Watchers* and John Cooper's *The Queen's Agent*. Both historians focus on the intelligence service built up by Walsingham and explore the inner workings of his network, such as where it was located and some of the personnel that were involved.<sup>16</sup> Alford dealt extensively with Walsingham's intelligence network and how it helped to protect Elizabeth from the plots fomented against her during the 1580s. He also noted the growth of Sir Robert Cecil's

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<sup>13</sup> Stephen Alford, *The Watchers, A Secret History of the Reign of Elizabeth I* (London, 2012) pp. 215-218; 236-240; John Cooper, *The Queen's Agent, Francis Walsingham at the Court of Elizabeth I* (London, 2011), pp. 217-233.

<sup>14</sup> R.B. Wernham, *Before the Armada: The Making of Elizabethan Foreign Policy, 1558-1603* (Oxford, 1966); Ibid, *After the Armada: Elizabethan England and the Struggle for Western Europe, 1588-1595*, (Oxford, 1984); Ibid, *The Return of the Armadas, the last years of Elizabethan wars against Spain, 1595-1603* (Oxford, 1994); Susan Doran, and Paulina Kewes (eds.), *Doubtful and Dangerous: The Question of Succession in late Elizabethan England* (Manchester, 2014); John Guy, *Elizabeth: The Forgotten Years* (St Ives, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Paul Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The political career of Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, 1585-1597* (Cambridge, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Cooper, *The Queen's Agent*, chapter 5; Alford, *The Watchers*, chapters 14, 15, 16 and 17.

intelligence network during the late 1590s and some of his early experiences of handling agents under the guidance of his father.<sup>17</sup> What Bossy, Alford and Cooper's work has shown is that the Elizabethan intelligence 'services' were not a formal institutional structure, but the creation of individual privy councillors, such as Walsingham and Burghley. The secretaries who worked under Walsingham were his servants and were thus paid by him and not necessarily by the state. They also supplemented their earnings by working in official governmental capacities, and the base of operations for Walsingham's intelligence network was his house at Seething Lane and not in a specially appropriated office space at Whitehall. Bossy emphasises this point: 'When we are told about the history of the Elizabethan secret service we may think of a headquarters, archives, ranks of officers, job descriptions, pensions ... [but instead] It is household government, if any; and not in general the household of the queen, but the households of her ministers'.<sup>18</sup>

This is a move away from the popular and more sensationalised monographs of Elizabethan intelligence services produced by the likes of Robert Hutchinson and Stephen Budiansky, in which Walsingham's intelligence network is likened to MI6 or the CIA and which do not go into the deficiencies that could arise whilst managing a sixteenth century intelligence network.<sup>19</sup> A more nuanced overview of Elizabethan espionage is presented by Alan Haynes, who stressed that 'Elizabethan espionage was the work of individuals, collaborating, not whole departments. It was controlled by individual officers of state, but ultimately had a collective, that is national, purpose'.<sup>20</sup> Because it covers such a wide period of time from c.1570-1603, there is little room to narrow down and explore in-depth individual intelligence networks and Robert Cecil's intelligence networks, his agents and how its income was managed are explored only briefly.<sup>21</sup> Patrick Martin's, *Elizabethan Espionage: Plotters and Spies in the Struggle Between*

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<sup>17</sup> Alford, *The Watchers*, pp. 279-284, 298-314.

<sup>18</sup> Bossy, *Under the Molehill*, pp. 144-45.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Hutchinson, *Elizabeth's Spy Master: Francis Walsingham and the Secret War that saved England* (London, 2007); Stephen Budiansky, *Her Majesty's Spymaster: Elizabeth I and the birth of Modern Espionage* (London, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> Alan Haynes, *The Elizabethan Secret Services* (Stroud, 1992, reprinted 2009) pp. xi-xii.

<sup>21</sup> Haynes, *Elizabethan Secret Services*, chapter 15.

*Catholicism and the Crown*, has given a more detailed insight into how an agent during the late Elizabethan period operated. Martin specifically looks at William Sterrell throughout his intelligence-gathering career from the 1590s until the middle of the 1620s. The book goes through the letters and documents that involve Sterrell very methodically, but it does not elaborate on how the network, in which Sterrell, was a vital cog, operated. Whereas, Cecil played a subsidiary role.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, there is a need to produce a detailed account of Cecil's intelligence networks, how effective they were, the methods that Cecil used to control the flow of information from his agents to himself back in London, and whether Cecil used any of Walsingham's previous methods or developed his own. These are the questions that other works beforehand have not answered.

In part, this is because the historiography has generally focussed on the 1580s and more broadly the espionage activities of the 1580s has always been of central interest to historians, whereas the 1590s have tended to be overlooked or side-lined by comparison. To this end, one of the aims of this thesis is to shift the historical perspective onto the intelligence networks created by Cecil during the 1590s and early 1600s. It must be stated that a similar approach has been adopted by Alford, who in his closing chapters of *The Watchers* does outline Cecil's intelligence network just as Haynes has done. He calls upon other scholars to explore these later networks, arguing that 'in 1600 the prognostications suggested that in a new century espials and intelligencers would be kept as busy as fellow members of their profession had been for forty years'.<sup>23</sup> The same could be said of the 1590s.

Whilst Cecil's place as one of the most important and influential late Tudor and early Stuart statesmen cannot be denied, his career as a whole has received relatively little attention by historians by comparison to other Elizabethan statesman. His first biography was published in 1915 by his descendent Algernon Cecil but it was not until 1959 that P.M. Handover's book

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<sup>22</sup> Patrick H Martin, *Elizabethan Espionage: Plotters and Spies in the Struggle Between Catholicism and the Crown* (North Carolina, 2016).

<sup>23</sup> Alford, *The Watchers*, p. 314.



*The Second Cecil: The Rise to Power of Sir Robert Cecil, 1563-1604* put his career under serious historical scrutiny. Handover summarised Cecil's career in his 'faultless control of circumstance, an adroitness in manoeuvre and an acute sense of timing, that enabled him to turn to advantage what appeared adverse or sterile'.<sup>24</sup> She also stated that 'he deserves memorial for that unique intelligence service, built up with patience and political insight, that was the foundation of his power'.<sup>25</sup> Having said this, Handover does not go into a great deal of depth on Cecil's intelligence network: she simply states the names of individual agents and does not consider how they conveyed the information that they had obtained back to Cecil. Nor does she explain the methods that Cecil adopted or where these methods originated from, and neither does she explain if the intelligence was of any practical use to Cecil. This is the gap which this thesis will fill, in that to understand how an early modern intelligence network functioned, the motives and methods of the spymaster have to be understood. Additionally, if his intelligence network can be seen as part of the foundation of his power then so too can the accumulation of offices that he was to receive after 1596. He was not only the principal secretary from July 1596, but also the chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster (1597, which he relinquished in 1599), master of the wards (21 May 1599) and lord treasurer (1608), which meant that he was one of the only Tudor statesmen to hold so many politically and financially important offices at once, which further underlines his importance as a figure of study.

Pauline Croft has been the most proficient historian to date to write prolifically on Cecil's career. Her many articles and book chapters cover a range of different aspects of his career and personality: his religious attitudes, his influence on English foreign policy and his household, although she has not published a comprehensive account of Cecil's life and political career.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> P.M. Handover, *The Second Cecil: The Rise to Power of Sir Robert Cecil, later first earl of Salisbury, 1563-1604* (Frome, 1959), pp. 317-318.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.

<sup>26</sup> See Pauline Croft, 'The Religion of Robert Cecil', *HJ*, 34 (1991), pp. 773-96; Croft, 'The reputation of Robert Cecil: libels, political opinion and popular awareness in the early seventeenth century', *TRHS*, sixth series., no. 1, (1991), pp. 43-69; Croft, 'Robert Cecil and the early Jacobean court', in L.L. Peck (eds.), *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court* (1991) pp. 134-47; Croft, 'Can a bureaucrat be a favourite?', in J. Elliott and L. Brockliss (eds.), *The world of the favourite* (London, 1999) pp. 81-95; Croft, 'Brussels and London: the archdukes, Robert Cecil and James I', in W. Thomas and L. Duerloo (eds.), *Albert and Isabella: essays* (Brussels, 1999), pp. 79-86; Croft, *Patronage, Culture and Power: the early*

Her article on his religion is especially interesting in that she concludes that by the time Cecil died his religious views had 'changed from the godly young sermon-goer of the 1580s' to a high church position. Croft emphasises that his religious beliefs changed over time, but there was one constant that remained true, and that was the belief that 'men who by their calling are employed in matters of state and government under great kings and princes, should not in consequence be assumed to be of little or no religion'.<sup>27</sup> His religion also had an influence on how he viewed English foreign policy; although naturally as a son of Burghley he was hostile towards Spain, he was willing to compromise and treat with Spain in order to obtain peace and security for English trade. He also differed from his father's hardline stance towards catholics. Croft points out that in the early 1590s, Cecil wanted to differentiate between those catholics who quietly retained their religious devotion but stayed loyal to the queen and those who used their religion as a means to cause disruption to the state, particularly the Jesuits.<sup>28</sup> This comparatively openminded outlook had implications for his intelligence network, and throughout its conception Cecil was always willing to take on agents who had in the past had ardent catholic leanings but whose insights and talents could be put to good use. In Cecil's mind this outweighed the inherent risk of double dealing that came with employing ex-catholic sympathisers.

Croft's work reaffirms the central role that Cecil played in nearly every aspect of English government from his installation as a member of the privy council in 1591 to his death in 1612. The image of Cecil that emerges from her work is that of a bureaucrat first and a courtier second. This thesis, however, argues that, Cecil was a combination of both as, to survive and prosper as a principal secretary for two different monarchs, Cecil needed to be adept at courtly charm as well as being a proficient secretary. Croft's work also demonstrates the effect his presence had within the social context of Elizabeth's court, especially in her article on his

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*Cecil's* (London, 2002); Croft, 'Rex pacificus, Robert Cecil and the 1604 peace with Spain', in Glenn Burgess, Rowland Wymer and Jason Lawrence (eds), *The Accession of James I* (London, 2006), pp. 140-154.

<sup>27</sup> Croft, 'Religion of Robert Cecil', pp. 795-96.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 783.

reputation. His deformity (he was born with a hunched back) made him the target of some vicious libels printed by his enemies, though crucially not in her view at the behest of Essex. However, Alexandra Gajda and Paul Hammer disagree with Croft's assertion. As Gajda writes that 'the private correspondence of Essex's close circle ... had given Essex every encouragement to see the Cecils as his enemies', whilst Hammer insists that Essex was the 'chief force which served to bind his enemies together'.<sup>29</sup> Essex could have told his close circle to stop besmirching Burghley and Cecil but instead he chose not to, therefore giving his consent to his friends' undermining of the Cecils' reputations.

His deformity coupled with the growth of his political power and influence naturally made him a target for such ridicule. These attacks and libels on his image occurred throughout his political life; especially in the periods when he was first appointed as a member of the privy council, between 1599-1601 with his falling out and involvement in the trial and execution of the Earl of Essex and in the immediate period after his death in 1612.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, shortly after his death Cecil did have tributes paid to him, albeit from close friends and acquaintances, so the libels did not defame his reputation completely.<sup>31</sup> Other works have also highlighted Cecil's important role in the governance of Tudor and Stuart England, Joel Hurstfield summed up his career by stating that 'The last two years of Elizabeth's reign were Cecil's years. His mind and will are seen in every policy which was tested out'.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Thomas Coakley in his article, 'Robert Cecil in Power: Elizabethan Politics in Two Reigns', highlights Cecil's appreciation of retaining the goodwill of the monarch as the key to his power and he always avoided 'appearing the principal actor or instigator' of policy ideas, leaving such roles to Essex and Raleigh to expose their flaws to the monarch and court.<sup>33</sup> Coakley also highlighted his

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<sup>29</sup> Alexandra Gajda, *The Earl of Essex and Late Elizabethan Political Culture* (Oxford, 2012) pp. 142, 147-49, quote from p. 148; Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, pp.397-98.

<sup>30</sup> Croft, 'Reputation of Robert Cecil', pp. 46-56.

<sup>31</sup> Croft, 'Reputation of Robert Cecil', pp. 46-48, 65-67.

<sup>32</sup> Joel Hurstfield, 'The Succession Struggle in Late Elizabethan England', in S.T. Bindoff, Joel Hurstfield and C.H. Williams (eds.), *Elizabethan Government and Society: Essays presented to Sir John Neale* (London, 1964) pp. 395-96.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas M. Coakley, 'Robert Cecil in Power: Elizabethan Politics in Two Reigns', in Howard S. Reinmuth Jr. (ed.), *Early Tudor Studies: Essays in honour of David Harris Wilson* (Minneapolis, 1970) pp. 64-94, esp. p. 65.

ability to work alongside his fellow privy councillors and the two monarchs that he served, including James' royal family and concludes that although Cecil may not have been a 'Richelieu or Mazarin endeavouring to make his king supreme, like Thomas Cromwell, Burghley and Walsingham', he was an able and reliable politician who managed to circumnavigate many political crises and leave the English state in a stable and more secure position than when he first became principal secretary.<sup>34</sup>

One aspect of Cecil's career and life that has drawn most attention by historians was his relationship with the Earl of Essex, as they were of a similar age and came to prominence at a similar time period. Previous historical thought had it that Cecil and Essex were at a constant enmity and they gathered around themselves factions in order to assert their political authority. This narrative pushed the ageing queen far from the political decision making process; in fact it might sometimes seem that she hardly had a voice at all during the 1590s.<sup>35</sup> However, there has been a different interpretation of Cecil and Essex's relationship which was first highlighted by Paul Hammer in his biography of Essex. Hammer has noted numerous occasions whereby both men actually had a reasonably good working relationship. Hammer also noted that it was Burghley's death in 1598 coupled with differences over English foreign policy which resulted in a breakdown of amity and the amalgamation of different factions centred around Cecil and Essex.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, it seemed that Essex, not Cecil or Burghley, were the instigator of their perceived rivalry. 'Although the rivalry between Essex and the Cecils was obvious by 1593, no overt Cecil faction appeared' to counter the faction which surrounded Essex.<sup>37</sup> Hammer also noted that 'the grouping of his adversaries which had emerged in 1597 was essentially an anti-Essex coalition, not a Cecil faction'.<sup>38</sup> This view is continued in a similar vein by Janet Dickinson in her work covering Essex's reputation and his relationships with the queen and

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<sup>34</sup> Coakley, 'Cecil in Power', pp. 92-94.

<sup>35</sup> John Guy (ed), *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade* (Cambridge, 1995); Natalie Mears, 'Regnum Cecilianum? A Cecilian perspective of the Court', in Guy (ed.), *Reign of Elizabeth I*, pp. 46-64; Alexandra Gajda, 'Essex and the 'popish plot'', in Doran and Kewes (eds.), *Doubtful and Dangerous*, pp. 115-133.

<sup>36</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, pp. 264, 286-291, 345-3360, 378-382.

<sup>37</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, p. 396.

<sup>38</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, p. 397.

her court. Where she differs from Hammer's argument, Dickinson asserts that open hostility actually took place for just over a year from 1599 to 1600. She queries the traditional narrative of constant animosity, instead revealing 'a great deal of evidence that points to what at times appears a warm, and was certainly a functional working relationship ... which persisted until late on in the decade, even to the point of Essex's fall from favour'.<sup>39</sup> Dickinson analyses various episodes whereby Cecil and Essex worked closely and amicably together, such as the expeditions to Cadiz in 1596 and to the Azores in 1597, and in helping Essex to secure the position of earl marshal in 1597.<sup>40</sup> She has also rightly pointed out that often it was Essex's followers who slandered Cecil the most and looked to create cases of conflict in order to further their own ends.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the queen herself played a central role in balancing the careers of both Essex and Cecil, such as by appointing Cecil as secretary of state in July 1596 and then allowing Essex to facilitate the Cadiz and Azores expeditions so that he could win some prestige for himself.<sup>42</sup>

As this analysis of the historiography has shown, there has been a gap in the historical narrative on Robert Cecil himself and more specifically on his espionage activities which have not been covered in depth by previous historians. This is important as it sheds light on how Cecil sought to defend England from her enemies, who these enemies were and how active they were in destabilising the peace in England, especially with an ageing monarch. This thesis will also explore a previously underappreciated aspect of England's proactive war effort to combat Spain: that of the use of gathering information. By creating an intelligence network Cecil proved that English councillors were not mildly waiting to be invaded or attacked by Spanish forces. They were in fact quite the opposite, using agents and spies to gain information on Spanish war aims and Jesuit intentions. By looking at Cecil's intelligence-gathering network we can gain a more rounded understanding of England's foreign policy

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<sup>39</sup> Janet Dickinson, *Court Politics and the Earl of Essex, 1589-1601* (Milton, 2012), pp. 80-81.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 88-91,

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, pp.99-113.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 91-92, 115-119.

activities during the 1590s. England did not only land troops on the European mainland and send loans to the Dutch. Cecil endeavoured to make sure that Elizabeth and her privy council could be as reliably informed as was reasonably possible of the intentions of England's enemies. In some respects this 'hidden' aspect of Elizabethan foreign policy may not have the glamour or the panache of Elizabethan expeditions against Spain conducted during the 1590s but, as this thesis will show, the importance of gaining intelligence would grow in importance as the decade unfolded.

With this in mind, this thesis will seek to answer a range of questions in regards to Cecil's intelligence networks: can Cecil's intelligence-gathering network be seen as a continuation of the practice of Elizabethan espionage used by Walsingham in the 1580s? What were the methods that Cecil used and how similar or different were they to his predecessors or contemporaries, namely Walsingham, Burghley and Essex? What agents or secretaries made up Cecil's intelligence gathering network; what were the names, backgrounds and experiences of those who made his intelligence network function? Lastly, how effective was Cecil's intelligence network up until 1603? In other words, did the intelligence that Cecil's agents gathered help Elizabeth and her privy council to defend England against its enemies?

The sources that will be used within this thesis mainly come from the State Papers, both domestic and foreign, and the Cecil Papers, as well as the calendared manuscripts of Lord De L'Isle and Dudley, the Burghley-Cecil correspondence between 1590-98, letters between Cecil and George Carew, and the correspondence between Cecil and King James. There is no single archive that explicitly deals with the agents that Cecil used, and therefore the evidence used in this thesis has come from a range of sources. There is, however, a list of (known) agents in use during Elizabeth's reign from 1558-1603 located SP 106 (State Papers Foreign, Ciphers, Elizabeth)'. A number of names and ciphers of Cecil's agents are located here, with their reports sent to Cecil, along with other evidence of their activities, and their backgrounds can be traced via the state papers and the Cecil papers.

In spite of this, it must be pointed out that there are certain problems with the quantity of sources; in short, they seem less extensive than might be expected. There are a number of reasons for this, one being that because of the nature of intelligence information, Cecil or his secretaries may have systematically destroyed intelligence gathered by certain agents once that agent had been dropped from the payroll or when the information was no longer useful. Some of the agents' reports may have been delivered verbally (thus leaving no written record) and quite simply the information sent to Cecil may not have reached him due to it being intercepted, lost in transit or deemed not worth recording in his records. There are also the more general problems when one embarks on a study of secret espionage in that of searching for documents that were supposed to be kept secret, dealing with false names and ciphered works or letters.

Fortunately, the reconstruction of Cecil's intelligence network is greatly helped by three documents entitled 'A list of certain intelligencers', dated to July 1597, 'A memorial of intelligencers in several places' dated to 1598 and 'Intelligencers employed abroad this year 1601'.<sup>43</sup> However, there is little evidence for activity in the intelligence sphere by Cecil before he was appointed as principal secretary. This is also true for the year 1595, although this may have more to do with Cecil awaiting his confirmation as secretary, before undertaking the enormous outlay of finance that maintaining an early modern intelligence gathering network could entail. Additionally, once his appointment became public knowledge, prospective intelligencers began writing to him as they knew he now had the finance and the standing at court to provide payment or to provide patronage in return for their services. In the years after he became a member of the privy council, in August 1591, there were various plots centred against the queen in which it was Cecil's task to investigate and extract confessions. At the same time he also had agents keeping an eye on suspected catholic gentry and assisting his

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<sup>43</sup> 'List of certain intelligencers', 1597/1598?, SP12/265 f.134r; 'A memorial of intelligencers in several places' 1598, SP12/265 ff. 204r-206r; 'Intelligencers employed abroad this yeare' 1601, SP 12/283 f.176r.

father in the intelligence-gathering sphere. Therefore, the lack of any specific evidence of Cecil building up his own intelligence network before he became principal secretary in July 1596 can be put down to his apprenticeship of governing under his father as well as Cecil himself lacking the funds and patronage pulling power he needed to build up his own network. On the other hand, Essex had these two attributes in abundance in the early to mid-1590s hence his intelligence network dominated this period.

### Structure of the thesis

This thesis is split into seven chapters with a conclusion to assess the findings that are made and the impact that Cecil's intelligence network had on Cecil's career and English policy. Chapter one covers Cecil's early life and education from 1563 to 1588. It highlights how Burghley paid particular attention to his second son's upbringing in his selection of tutors and the values that he wished to instil in Cecil. This will be demonstrated by a document listing the 'Ten Precepts' that Burghley wrote for Cecil. The second half of the chapter looks at Cecil's overseas trips to France in 1584 and to the Low Countries in 1588 whereby he began to develop the contacts and the ability to sift fact from fiction that he would need in his later intelligence career.

Chapter two examines Cecil's early political and intelligence gathering career between 1589 and 1592. This period covers his appointment to the privy council (1591) where he was able for the first time to gain some experience in the intelligence sphere, albeit under the tutelage of his father, and the scramble to succeed Walsingham as principal secretary after his death, which involved the Cecils and their rivals backed by other privy councillors. This gives an early indication of Burghley's desire to see his son take over Walsingham's place and claim a position of high patronage and influence. The chapter also shows how Cecil gained experience in interrogating and monitoring prospective agents, as well as having a hand in the surveillance



of the catholic nobility and infiltrating London prisons where Jesuits and suspected priests were being held.

Chapter three examines the spate of plots and conspiracies that sprang up over the years 1593 to 1594. These plots involved the merchant and ex-soldier Richard Hesketh in 1593, the Irishmen William Polwhele, John Annias, Patrick Collen and Hugh Cahill in 1594-95, the queen's physician, Dr Rodrigo Lopez, in early 1594, and a plot involving the soldiers Edmund Yorke and Richard Williams which started in 1594 and was not fully resolved until early 1595. Most of the plots, apart from the Lopez plot, involved the English renegade Sir William Stanley who worked alongside the English Jesuits to foment dissention and incite rebellion in Elizabeth's realm to pave the way for a Spanish invasion. This chapter will argue that even though the plots came to nothing, and were indeed badly planned, they convinced Burghley, Cecil and Essex that there were still active threats against the state coming from the continent. These plots could have reinforced to Cecil that a comprehensive intelligence gathering network was needed to be revived in order to keep under surveillance those enemies of England who would look to destabilise the security of the realm, as to not do so would leave the English government blind.

Chapter four charts Cecil's appointment to the post of principal secretary, which became the catalyst to his development of a fully-fledged intelligence network. Cecil's work in the Irish theatre of Elizabeth's wars and his assistance to Essex in securing the area around the port of Calais from Spanish attack in April 1596, both proved to Elizabeth that he could be trusted to manage all the predicaments that England faced during the mid-1590s. The second half of the chapter deals with the threats that faced Cecil after his appointment: the armadas launched by Spain in late 1596 and October/November 1597. These two events were significant for Cecil in that the agents that he had accumulated so far into his network were found wanting. Thus he needed radically to rethink his set up, both in its scope and implementation.

Chapter five uses the events surrounding the 'invisible' armada of July/August 1599 as a case study to demonstrate the effectiveness of the network which had been built upon during 1596-

1598. Additionally, the militia that was raised to defend the south coast against this perceived armada was the biggest call up of men and material since the grand armada of 1588. Therefore, a comparison of the two call ups can tell us how much the privy council of 1599 had copied or adapted the procedures of their forebears, an exercise that Cecil was instrumental in organising and implementing. The sixth chapter explores Cecil's crucial role in the Elizabethan succession and how he used his intelligence gathering network to safeguard his chosen successor, James VI of Scotland, against other catholic claimants and a Spanish invasion of Ireland. In the domestic sphere, as Elizabeth's reign drew to a close and that of James I began, the chapter will also examine the steps and procedures that Cecil put in place to safeguard the stability of the monarch's new government as well as his own position.

The final chapter analyses the methodology of Cecil's intelligence network. Questions considered here include what influences his predecessors and contemporaries, Walsingham, Burghley and Essex, had on its structure, use of personnel, his agents' background and the make up of his secretariat. It will be shown that Cecil drew upon aspects of different intelligence networks that had gone before him as these tactics and systems had worked well for the Elizabethan state in the 1580s and therefore should work for the newer generation of Elizabethan ministers. Furthermore, just as Cecil's intelligence network grew and expanded, so did his influence within Elizabeth's court. His growing influence can also be seen in his accumulation of offices between 1596-1601 as well as his ability to secure his supporters and kin in key positions within the Elizabethan government and bureaucracy.

The conclusion brings together all these strands of evidence on the importance of Cecil's intelligence network to the safe-guarding of the Elizabethan state and arguing that his network's success had a significant impact on his political career. It will also show that maintaining an early modern intelligence network was very challenging and that there were times when his agents and the intelligence that they gave him proved wrong or did not arrive in time to affect his decision making. Nevertheless, the overriding factor was that Cecil thought that intelligence gathering was a worthwhile enterprise to invest time and effort in. It will also

be shown that there had been a continuation of Elizabethan intelligence gathering techniques that did not fall out of use after Walsingham's death and that Cecil was at the forefront of this. Finally, the thesis will show that Cecil's intelligence gathering network would be of use in James' reign as it had been in his predecessors. For although England's enemies had been quashed or quietened for the time being as the new reign progressed into its opening decade, seventeenth century intelligence gathering would play just as important a role as it had done in the 1580s and 1590s.

## Chapter One: Robert Cecil's Education and Early Political Career, 1563-1588

This chapter will focus on the education that Cecil received during his formative years between 1563-1588. By emphasising certain experiences in Cecil's early life we can steadily see him picking up the skills and contacts that he would need in order to have a highly successful career in late Elizabethan high politics. Like many of his contemporaries, the education that Cecil received at home from his tutors and his parents helped to shape his perception of the wider world and his religious affiliation. These perceptions would go on to influence both his political and intelligence career. It was not until he was granted permission to travel to France in 1584 and the Low Countries in 1588 that we can see Cecil developing his own character and interpersonal skills away from the immediate attention of his father, although the two exchanged frequent letters. This chapter will also outline Cecil's first forays into parliament, an important arena for gaining contacts and announcing himself to the wider Elizabethan political elite. The first part of this chapter will discuss the influence that Burghley had in Cecil's early education whilst he was a child at the family home of Theobalds in Hertfordshire.

Robert Cecil was born on 1 June 1563 at Cecil House, on the Strand, to Sir William Cecil, Lord Burghley and his second wife, Mildred Cecil (née Cooke), Lady Burghley; he was their second surviving child and only son.<sup>1</sup> All of the Cecil children, especially the surviving boys Thomas (Burghley's son by his first wife) and Robert, grew up under strict supervision whereby their father knew exactly when their meals were served and who was present and also who attended what lesson.<sup>2</sup> Cecil's main lessons included Latin, law and diplomacy; he also learned Greek, French, Italian and Spanish, skills which he would put to good use in both his later political and intelligence career. Cecil was also taught mathematics, music, calligraphy and religion. History was also an important part of his early education, especially Roman law

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Alford, *Burghley: William Cecil at the Court of Elizabeth I*, (London, 2008), pp. 30-31, 125-127; 'Cecil, Robert, first earl of Salisbury (1563–1612), politician and courtier', *ODNB*.

<sup>2</sup> David Loades, *The Cecils: Privilege and Power behind the throne*, (Surrey, 2007) p. 206.

and statecraft. Later in life, Cecil would often find parallels between figures and events of his own day and liken them to ancient Romans such as Galba and Nerva.<sup>3</sup>

This classical and humanist education was reinforced by the interior space and layout of the Cecils' home in Theobalds. James Sutton has highlighted how the rooms of the house, especially the Green Gallery, the Great Gallery, the Great Chamber and the painted loggia, were designed to teach a young Robert Cecil much that a son of one of the most influential families in England needed to learn.<sup>4</sup> The Green Gallery contained maps based on those of the cartographer Christopher Saxton and wall friezes of trees which represented the coat-of-arms of nobleman in England and in which counties they were located. It was of course important for a future principal secretary to know of and to recognise who was who amongst the Elizabethan aristocracy to be able to swiftly make important political connections and this room enabled Cecil to start developing this skill.<sup>5</sup> The Great Gallery contained friezes of the important towns and cities in Europe, such as Paris, Rome, Antwerp, Vienna and major German and Flemish towns. It also contained friezes of important Roman Emperors, characters from Greek mythology and the six English kings whose reigns spanned the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>6</sup> Facing these along the opposite wall were portraits of some of the most important continental leaders that were near-contemporary to Cecil, which informed him of some of the important players he would need to familiarise himself with and the history of conflict in France and the Spanish Netherlands once he pursued his political career.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the astrological paintings housed within the Great Chamber taught Cecil about celestial mapping and the painted loggia contained wall paintings of the genealogy of the Cecil family and their fanciful connections to the Tudor dynasty.<sup>8</sup> All in all Burghley had

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<sup>3</sup> Handover, *The Second Cecil*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>4</sup> James M. Sutton, 'The Decorative Program at Elizabethan Theobalds: Educating an Heir and Promoting a Dynasty', *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, (Fall-Winter, 1999-2000), pp. 33-64.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 38-43.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 51-56.

made sure that his favoured second son had the most informative and best start to his education than any could have wished for.

During the late 1560s and early 1570s, his early childhood, whilst he was being tutored at home by his mother, Cecil met and was influenced by both Henry Maynard, who he would correspond and meet regularly as his father's future secretary, and Michael Hicke. Hicke joined the household soon after Cecil's birth, having studied at Trinity College, Cambridge and Lincoln's Inn; his speciality was in finance and thus he became indispensable to Burghley. Even though there was a twenty year age gap between them, Cecil and Hicke became good companions with Cecil affectionately calling him in his letters 'good Michael' and also exchanging many bantering letters between themselves where one can see a different side to Cecil than the serious persona that emerges from the majority of his surviving letters.<sup>9</sup> In a few letters in particular Cecil jokingly commented on Hicke's 'bald crowne' and gently chided him over his expenses.<sup>10</sup> Cecil also reported political news such as in a letter dated to 1589, where Cecil reported that the King of Navarre 'hath under his hand and seale vowed [in] no way to chang any religion', and he kept Hicke informed of the political machinations at court.<sup>11</sup>

Cecil's first known tutors were the university trained and puritan leaning Richard Howland and Walter Travers<sup>12</sup>; it was these men whom his father had handpicked to instil Cecil into the protestant beliefs and how they saw the world.<sup>13</sup>

The next influential figure in Cecil's life was to found when he visited at the direction of Burghley St John's College, Cambridge, in July 1581. During his visit here he encountered many figures with whom he worked alongside during his political career. These included Henry

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<sup>9</sup> See Lansdowne MSS vol. 7, ff. 66, 78, 80, 81, 83, 88, 220; vol. 64 f.147; vol. 65 f.192; vol. 66 f.186; vol. 68 f.202; vol 72 f.222; vol 77 f.218; vol 107 f.103;

<sup>10</sup> Cecil to Hicke, 1590, Lansdowne MSS, vol 64, f.147v; Cecil to Hicke, undated, Lansdowne MSS, vol.7 f.80v.

<sup>11</sup> Cecil to Hicke, 1589, Lansdowne MSS, vol. 61 f.210v; Cecil to Hicke undated, Lansdowne MSS, vol. 77, f. 78v.

<sup>12</sup> 'Richard Howland (1540-1600), Bishop of Peterborough', *ODNB*; 'Walter Travers (1548?-1635), Religious Activist and College Head', *ODNB*.

<sup>13</sup> Alan Haynes, *Robert Cecil: 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Salisbury*, (London, 1989), p.15; Loades, *The Cecils*, p. 207.

Howard, second son of the attainted Duke of Norfolk, Anthony and Francis Bacon and Richard Bancroft, a preacher at the University since 1576.<sup>14</sup> Dr Andrew Perne, was the Vice-Chancellor in 1581, and a friend of his father's. Perne and Burghley favoured the moderate form of Protestantism set down by the Elizabethan Church; zealots and fanatics were seen as a threat to the status quo and peace of the commonwealth. Perne was much impressed by Cecil, writing to Burghley to inform him of his son's 'godly diligence both at sermons and disputations'.<sup>15</sup> It seems that Cecil was already displaying some of the skills that would characterise his professional career and his personality, including the ability to debate effectively and assimilate information quickly and accurately. Also of influence on Cecil's early religious outlook were Alexander Nowell (Dean of St Paul's) and Gabriel Goodman (Dean of Westminster), whose sermons Cecil would have attended and who provided protestant messages that Burghley and Lady Mildred would have approved of.<sup>16</sup>

An insight into the sort of qualities and beliefs that Burghley expected from his sons can be found in a document in which Burghley listed ten points which he wanted to ensure that Cecil developed, so that 'entering into this exorbitant age, [he] mayst be the better prepared'. Burghley then reminded Cecil that 'such advice and rules for the squaring of thy life ... as are gained rather by long experience than much reading'.<sup>17</sup> Fred B. Tromly has reassessed Burghley's 'Ten Precepts' to Cecil and argued that the traditional assignment of a pre-1585 date is wrong and that it was more likely compiled around 1587 when he was in his mid-twenties.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Dr Andrew Perne to Burghley, 9 July 1581, SP12/149 f. 159r; Handover, *The Second Cecil*, p.24; William Dixon Acres, 'The early political career of Sir Robert Cecil, 1582-1597: some aspects of late Elizabethan secretarial administration', (Unpublished PhD Cambridge, 1992), p.4.

<sup>15</sup> Dr Andrew Perne to Burghley, 9 July 1581, SP 12/149 f.65r; Handover, *The Second Cecil*, pp. 26-27; Croft, 'The Religion of Robert Cecil', pp. 774-75.

<sup>16</sup> Alford, *Burghley*, pp. 70, 123, 309.

<sup>17</sup> Handover, *The Second Cecil*, pp. 29-30, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Tromly has based his argument on the allusions to the 'popularity' of Essex and Raleigh and to William Wilkinson, one of Cecil's puritan leading tutors. Even though this is a compelling argument, his analysis that the document was primarily used to instruct Cecil on how to become a paterfamilias is too one-sided. There are other points that give advice on garnering political support and how to act around social peers that must also be taken into account.

The first six points of the document dealt with the basics that any father in the Tudor period would have wanted his son to learn: to marry well (especially with an eye to patronage and money); to look to the education of his children; and to spend his money wisely (a lesson that his older half-brother Thomas had ignored). Point four instructed Cecil to 'Let thy kindred and allies be welcome' and to get rid of those who would look to gain advantage at the expense of Cecil's own ambitions. Point five dealt with the necessity of shrewdly lending and borrowing money and point six instructed Cecil to be generous to the poor and charitable causes.<sup>19</sup>

In the next few points, Burghley instructed Cecil to adopt both the behaviour and characteristics which would serve him well in his career in high office. He advised his son to 'Be sure to keep some great man thy friend', as a man without a powerful patron was 'like a hop without bine ... a football for every insulting companion to spurn'. Even though naturally Burghley would be Cecil's main patron, Cecil would recognise that he would need the patronage of the other great men of Elizabeth's privy council if he was to advance to high political office, especially if Burghley died. Therefore, he worked to gain the respect or approval of men such as Sir Francis Walsingham, Sir Christopher Hatton and William Brooke, tenth Baron Cobham. To gain the support of the latter, Burghley had Cecil marry Cobham's daughter, Elizabeth Brooke, in August 1589.<sup>20</sup> Point eight counsels Cecil 'towards thy superior be humble yet generous, with thy equal familiar yet respective, towards thy inferior show humblity and some familiarity ... The first prepares the way to thy advancement, the second makes thee known for a man well bred, the third gains a good report'. But Burghley warned 'I advise thee not to affect popularity too much: seek not to be E [Essex?] and shun to be R [Raleigh?].<sup>21</sup> Norman Jones highlights the importance of the maintenance of good and cordial patronage and clientage relationships; those who wished to gain a career in high governance were expected to be gracious when dealing with their inferiors. Additionally, the notion of honour

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<sup>19</sup> Loades, *The Cecils*, pp. 208-209.

<sup>20</sup> Captain Allen to Anthony Bacon, 17 August 1589, in Thomas Birch, *Memorials of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth from the year 1581 until her death*, vol. 1 (London, 1754) p. 57; Loades, *The Cecils*, p. 216; Haynes, *Robert Cecil*, p. 20; Handover, *The Second Cecil*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>21</sup> Tromly, 'Ten Precepts', p. 186.



was hugely important and Cecil was expected to uphold and enhance his family's prestige. Thus he was expected to serve his monarch but he had to be careful to use the power given to him for its desired ends or it might be withdrawn by the queen. Certainly one's peers would monitor one's behaviour once one gained high office.<sup>22</sup> The last point advised against putting too much of one's trust in any one person: 'Trust not any with thy life, credit or estate', and advised not to engage in defamatory conversation or rumour mongering about one's peers and colleagues: 'Be not scurrilous with thy conversation or satirical in thy jests'.<sup>23</sup> Summed up, the last four points in Burghley's advice to Robert Cecil could easily refer to any young civil servant looking to make his way in the world of late Elizabethan high politics. In Cecil's case, however, he was expected to climb to the top of Elizabethan governance and therefore this advice would become a blueprint of how he would approach and correspond with members of the Privy Council, those who had higher political and social rank than him.

A window into Cecil's social contacts can be seen in his letters to Michael Hickes where Cecil asks him to arrange for letters to be delivered to Herbert Henry, second Earl of Pembroke, who was the lord president of the Council of the Marches, and his elder sister Anne de Vere, neé Cecil, who was married to Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford and thus an important dynastic marriage. He also asked Hickes to commend him to the Earl of Southampton, Sir Henry Hopton and the Earl of Arundel, who were all notable personages within Elizabethan high society, and therefore useful connections for a young Robert Cecil to have.<sup>24</sup>

### Cecil's trips to France 1584 and the Low Countries 1588

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<sup>22</sup> Norman Jones, *Governing by Virtue, Lord Burghley and the Management of Elizabethan England* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 18-19.

<sup>23</sup> Advice from Burghley to Robert Cecil, 1582?, *British Library (BL) Stowe MSS.* f.143r-v.

<sup>24</sup> Cecil to Hickes, [catalogue dated to 1590 but surely to either 1586/87 as Cecil's sister Anne died in 1588], *Lansdowne MSS*, vol 65 f.192r-v.

Unfortunately, there is little information on Cecil's movements between the time he left Cambridge in 1581 and his trip to France in the summer of 1584. Nevertheless, Croft in her ODNB article places Cecil being tutored at home by William Wilkinson, a fellow of St John's College, Cambridge, and states that he visited France for the first time in the summer and autumn of 1583, but elaborates no further.<sup>25</sup> Presumably around this time, as Cecil was around twenty or twenty-one years old, Burghley must have taken a more personal role in his second son's education. This could have come in the form of making Cecil aware of the political situation at home and abroad, the intricacies of court life and how Burghley managed his voluminous correspondence. It can be surmised therefore that Cecil spent these intervening few years by finishing off his tutoring at home, whilst at the same time developing his working relationship with his father, one that would be instrumental in the rise of his political career.

Cecil first political assignments involved him travelling to France during August and September 1584 and the Low Countries in February to April 1588 as part of the learning process to gain practical experience of serving abroad. Burghley chose to send the then twenty-one year old Cecil to France as the political infighting between the competing factions of the catholic House of Guise and the protestant King of Navarre introduced him into the volatile world of power politics, patronage and intrigue.<sup>26</sup> Burghley was keen that his youngest son should not repeat the vices and excesses that his elder half-brother Thomas had committed during his longer tour of France, Germany and the Netherlands. This was not to be the case with Cecil as when he arrived in Paris in August 1584 he politely declined to stay with Sir Edward Stafford, the ambassador to France, as he wanted to learn French more fluently and thought that by staying in the company of Frenchmen he would have a better chance of achieving this aim.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> 'Cecil, Robert, Politician and Courtier', *ODNB*.

<sup>26</sup> Cecil to Walsingham, 28 September 1584, British Library, Cotton, Galba E/VI f. 263r-v; Handover, *The Second Cecil*, p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> David Potter (ed.), *Foreign Intelligence and Information in Elizabethan England: Two English Treatises on the State of France, 1580-1584*, Camden Fifth Series, vol 25, (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 7-8.

However, learning French was not the only reason he was sent to France. Through Stafford, Cecil was able to obtain useful information from Charles Paget, a leading figure among the English catholic exiles. Cecil's other role was to write a document for Sir Francis Walsingham detailing what he had learnt about the politics of and families of the French court. By 30 September, once he had travelled with Stafford to the French court at Orleans, he had written twenty-seven pages on the country, sub-divided into provinces and detailing the most important families in each region, their religious leanings and their political affiliation.<sup>28</sup> By 3 October he had written a further twelve pages detailing the princes of the blood and their religious and political affiliations, and another ten on the different marriage alliances.<sup>29</sup> Nick Popper has argued that members of the Elizabethan political elite, such as Walsingham, would use the knowledge gained from these budding young civil servants on their travels to supplement their own information about a specific region. Not only would someone in Cecil's position gain practical experience from his trip abroad but also the opportunity to prove his worth to powerful patrons, a lesson Burghley had placed great emphasis on.<sup>30</sup> Cecil's short time in France can be seen as a modest success as he had demonstrated to his father that he could be trusted to behave himself when asked to visit a foreign country. He had also demonstrated that he could move in courtly circles and most importantly he had gained an invaluable patron in the form of Sir Francis Walsingham.

During the intervening years of 1584-88, Cecil slowly but surely gained the political and social connections that would allow him to fully integrate himself into the Elizabethan political elite. In 1586, he sat in parliament for his home locality of Westminster.<sup>31</sup> It was in this parliament that Elizabeth came under increasing pressure to execute Mary Queen of Scots and, although Cecil himself did not speak, he must have listened avidly to the debates and on the reports of

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<sup>28</sup> Notes of points to be investigated in visiting a country, [Sep?] 1584, *CSPF*, August 1584-August 1585, vol. 19, p. 83; Handover, *The Second Cecil*, pp. 42-3; Potter, *Foreign Intelligence*, pp. 25-54.

<sup>29</sup> A paper in Robert Cecil's handwriting, Oct. 3 1584, *CSPF*, August 1584-August 1585, vol. 19, pp. 87-88; Handover, *The Second Cecil*, pp.42-3; Potter, *Foreign Intelligence*, pp. 55-120.

<sup>30</sup> Nick Popper, 'An Information State for Elizabethan England', *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 90, (September, 2018), pp. 503-535, esp. pp. 509-514.

<sup>31</sup> Alford, *Burghley*, p. 300.

the resulting delegation sent by both houses to petition the queen on 24 November. In 1587, he was appointed a Justice of the Peace for Hertfordshire, where Burghley was in the process of building an estate around Theobalds.<sup>32</sup> In July 1588, as the Spanish Armada approached England, Cecil was appointed as master of the ordnance at the camp at Tilbury.<sup>33</sup> In 1589 Burghley obtained for him the prestigious place of senior knight of the shire for Hertfordshire, demonstrating that he was acclimatising well to his new found role as an administrator and a politically active member of society, albeit with his father's patronage.<sup>34</sup>

In August 1589, as we have seen, Cecil married Elizabeth Brooke, daughter of the tenth Lord Cobham. She brought the Cecil family another important link within the Elizabethan aristocracy. On a more personal level, by all accounts, it was a love match. It was also beneficial politically as Elizabeth was serving the queen as her lady in waiting, and as the queen's godchild, she was able to subtly help further Cecil's political ambitions due to the amount of time she spent with Elizabeth. Unfortunately, Cecil's mother Mildred Cecil, Lady Burghley did not live to see the marriage, having died in April 1589, but she did play a role in helping to negotiate the marriage and bringing the two together.<sup>35</sup> Her death also had a devastating effect on Burghley and it was during the years after Mildred's death that father and son began to work more closely together, perhaps in a way to bear the loss.<sup>36</sup> A few years later after their marriage Cecil asked Hickes to inform his father-in-law 'for his remembrance of me in requital whereof I can promis nothinge certaine, but my love and service, and \for/ uncertainty I hope to be the cause [of] it his daughter shall make my Lady a Grandmother'.<sup>37</sup> A son, William, was duly born on 28 March 1591 with a daughter, Frances, following in 1593. A third child was due but

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, pp. 300-301.

<sup>33</sup> Haynes, *Robert Cecil*, p. 19.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 20; Loades, *The Cecils*, p. 216; Alford, *Burghley*, p. 300.

<sup>35</sup> Alford, *Burghley*, pp. 308, 311.

<sup>36</sup> Loades, *The Cecils*, pp.190-191; Alford, *Burghley*, pp. 308-309; John Guy, *Elizabeth: The Forgotten Years*, (St Ives, 2016), pp. 240-241.

<sup>37</sup> Cecil to Hickes, 10 March 1591, Lansdowne MSS, vol. 66, f.186v.

tragically in January 1597 Elizabeth suffered a miscarriage and died, leaving Cecil heartbroken and grief stricken, so much so that he never remarried.<sup>38</sup>

Cecil's next chance to enhance his political skills came in early February 1588 when the queen appointed a commission headed by Henry Stanley, fourth Earl of Derby, to try and negotiate peace with the Duke of Parma in the Spanish Netherlands. Cecil desperately wanted to join the commission as an unofficial observer so he approached Derby who gave him, so Cecil reported to Burghley, 'many testimonies of his kindness, even before my face'.<sup>39</sup> However, he still needed his father's consent and it seems that his mother Mildred was instrumental in finally persuading Burghley to let him go:

Although for her part it was not a journey yt [that] she wold haue chosen out for me in respect both of the unpleasantnes of the country and mine owne not strongest constitution, yet considering I shold go in good company did the better like of it and therfore wold in no sort hinder it, only adding this yt if any harme come to me I shold thank my self.<sup>40</sup>

Cecil also promised that he would behave himself whilst on his journey: he would 'apply my self to no evil cours, but only to see and heare something yt may make me wiser, and yeld me the satisfaction yt the being present at such a matter how euer it succeed, may afford my yong years.'<sup>41</sup> The Earl of Derby himself also sent Burghley a letter asking if Cecil could accompany the peace commission as his

contynuall presens I have so good lykng of for those rare partes whiche I dayle find in him that we allmoste be never assounder but at bedde tyme. I have entreated him to ride with me in my Couche, both because I wold shrowde him

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<sup>38</sup> Alford, *Burghley*, p. 312; Loades, *The Cecils*, pp. 236-237, Haynes, *Robert Cecil*, pp. 161-162.

<sup>39</sup> Cecil to Burghley, 14 February 1588, SP 12/208 f.108r.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, SP 12/208 f.108r.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, SP 12/208 f.108v.

frome the coulde blastes, which some tymes we taste of ridynge throwe this  
bleake and Champayne countrye.<sup>42</sup>

Having received both his father's and Derby's blessing, he then joined the others who made up the commission with Derby: Lord Cobham, warden of the Cinque Ports; Sir James Croft, Comptroller of the Queen's Household; and two doctors of civil law, Valentine Dale and John Rogers. Derby also took Thomas Spencer, his daughter-in-law's brother and Cecil's cousin.<sup>43</sup>

During the commission's wait for a berth in Dover, Cecil struck up a good friendship with Valentine Dale. Dale was a seasoned diplomat who found Cecil responsive, intelligent and well able to maintain himself in conversation and thought he was 'the most amiable and uncomplaining of travelling companion'.<sup>44</sup> This praise must of course be tempered by the fact that Valentine and Derby would not have said otherwise about a son of the most influential politician in England.

Cecil also received a letter from the queen in which Cecil told Burghley that she spoke to him 'under her sporting name of pigmy, bidding me take care of my health, and looking to hear from me. I have not presumed to write, because I must either write of nothing, or enter into what is subject here to suspicion, and there to misconstruction'. He went on to confide in his father that 'I show that I mislike not that name she gave me, only because she gives it. It was interlaced with fairer words than I am worthy of'.<sup>45</sup> In the years that followed Cecil have continued to 'mislike' the nickname, but like everyone who wanted a career in Elizabethan high politics, he would have to endure it for the sake of her patronage and favour.<sup>46</sup>

At a meeting between the queen's diplomats and Sir John Conway, Governor of Ostend, Cecil obtained a letter which had been intercepted by Conway, detailing how the Jesuit Thomas Worthington and one of Stanley's captains, a man called Bostock, 'slanderously wryteth yt

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<sup>42</sup> Earl of Derby to Burghley, 10 February 1587, Lansdowne MSS, vol 55, f.118v.

<sup>43</sup> Handover, *The Second Cecil*, p. 55; Haynes, *Robert Cecil*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>44</sup> Valentine Dale to Burghley, 14 March 1588, SP 77/2 f.281r.

<sup>45</sup> Cecil to Burghley, 16 February 1588, CSPD, 1580-1625, vol. 30, p.241.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Darby Cobham and Crofts ar coming over to beg a Peace at the Dukes Hand though they can not be so blynd as ever to thynk yt they shold obtay[n]e it. Herby may be gathered yt our greatist enemies ar our own unnaturall contrymen who will leave neyther Practise nor slander unserched to Interrupt any good or quiet'.<sup>47</sup> This was an early lesson to Cecil that in treating with those such as the Duke of Parma, he would have to be cautious of the Jesuits and the English catholic exiles in the background trying to jeopardise any attempts by the English to make peace. In the meantime, Cecil informed his father by letter of the conditions inside the town, joking that 'If my lady of Oxford [Cecil's sister] were here her beauty would quickly be marred, for when we sit in our poor lodging by the fire, we look all as pale and wan as ashes by the smoke of our turfs, which makes me envy your lordship's porter, that sits all day by a sweet fire of sea coal in your lodge'.<sup>48</sup> As for Ostend itself, Cecil was less impressed, informing Hickes that he feared for his safety and that 'the soldiours evry day disposed to mutynyes, [with] nothing to be had but what we brought w[i]th us'.<sup>49</sup> Luckily for Cecil, Spencer returned from Bruges a few days later with Parma's secretary, Monsieur Grenier. Cecil studied the secretary closely, commenting that:

His personage [is] but small and not above thirty-six years old at the most, very well favoured and appareled, neyther like a soldiourwholly nor yet as of the long robe particularly. His cloak to the knee furred, a cashock of black velvet with playne gold buttons and a gold Cheyne [chain]about his neck.<sup>50</sup>

Later that evening, over supper, Cecil was engaged in conversation with Grenier over the state of the Low Countries. Grenier wished that:

I [Cecil] would take occasion to come and see the towns hereabouts, but especially the miserable ruins of this poore contry and people wherby it might appeare ytmuch they had to answer for ytby their rebellion against theyr Lord,

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<sup>47</sup> Cecil to Burghley, 27 February 1588, SP 84/21 f. 242r.

<sup>48</sup> Cecil to Burghley, 27 February 1588, CSPF, January-June 1588, vol. 21 p.132.

<sup>49</sup> Cecil to Hickes, 29 February 1588?, Lansdowne MSS, vol 7, f.74r.

<sup>50</sup> Cecil to Burghley, 4 March 1588, SP 77/2 f.194r.

bene cause of so great effusion of blood, and desolation of so goodly townes and terrytories. To this I answered ytl cold not but concurr with him in lamenting the miseries of these provinces ... wherof for asmuch as it was very disputable from what hadd this fountayne of calamity was both fedd and derived, I wold not enter further therin it being a matter much to high for my capacity.<sup>51</sup>

Grenier sought to entrap Cecil into openly criticising England's Dutch allies, blaming them for starting the rebellion and thus the damage caused to the country. Fortunately, Cecil had the political dissimulation to deflect the question, a technique that he would use to good effect against his future political rivals.

On Saturday 9 March, he and the peace delegation was received by the Duke of Parma himself, since he was the son of Lord Burghley, and it would have been seen as a slight against him if the Duke did not grant an audience with one of his sons. Cecil noted that: 'Small and mean was the furniture of the chamber, a sign that peace is the mother of all honour and state'. He then recounted how the duke heard Dale's message about negotiating a peace and he assured him that he would do all he could to procure such a peace if possible. Then the duke addressed Cecil personally, asking him about the queen, and saying that he wanted her to know that he himself had no desire to carry on this war of attrition against the Hollanders. Cecil answered that 'I knew her Majesty esteemed him as a prince of great honour and virtue, and no man should have cause but to think her M. most zealously affected to bring all things to a perfect peace'.<sup>52</sup>

The next day Cecil and Dale were granted a passport by the Duke and travelled to Antwerp where they were both greeted by the governor and shown around its famous markets and trading houses. When writing to his father on the 14 March, he was struck by 'one of the pleasantest cities yt euer I saw, for situation and building, but utterly left and abandoned by

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<sup>51</sup> Cecil to Burghley, 4 March 1588, SP 77/2 f.194v; Handover, *The Second Cecil*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>52</sup> Cecil to Burghley, 10 March 1588, CSPD, 1580-1625, p. 184; Cecil to Burghley, 10 March 1588, CSPF, January-June 1588, vol. 21, pp. 184-5.



those rich merchants [who] were wont to frequent this place ...'.<sup>53</sup> He also admitted that 'What the Duke's mind may be I have nothing but outward appearances to inform me', suggesting that Cecil was not drawn in by the Duke's protestations of peace. Cecil then went on to give his assessment on the state of the war and how peace could benefit both sides.

If the warr utterly cease, and he retire him self home, his own patrimony is great as he hath sufficient to maintaine the dignity of a Prince and yt beyond his father, having ... not a little enriched him self in these warrs. If by an accord the state of these Contries come to repose, and yt the trade beginn againe to be sett open for merchants, such is the Industry of the people and so great wilbe the traffic, as if the grownd may be tilled, and the townes frequented especially from England and the E[a]sterlings, he yt shall heare peacably comaund for the K[ing] shall live in greater happines the[n] the K[ing] of Spaine him self w[i]th all his riches, w[hi]ch is not a little now exhausted to maintaine these forces.<sup>54</sup>

To him war was an anathema because of its impact on trade, and a country could only prosper through peace and trade, whilst war only brought destruction and misery, as he had experienced on his journey throughout the Low Countries. The maintenance and promotion of trade and peace coupled with the reluctance to engage in war would be the cornerstone of Cecil's foreign policy once he became principal secretary. By 20 March he journeyed to Brill in a hoy accompanied by twenty musketeers and received a warm welcome before returning to Ostend by the end of March. There he learned that the peace negotiations had not been successful during his absence. By 11 April, seeing that the peace negotiations were most likely to fail, Cecil decided to return to England.

During his trip Cecil had managed to forge good relationships both with his fellow English travellers but also with the foreign emissaries that he encountered. Valentine Dale in particular spoke highly of Cecil as they travelled through the Spanish Netherlands. Writing to Burghley, Dale detailed at one point during the journey that 'Mr. Cecil sat 9 hours upon his horse in foul

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<sup>53</sup> Cecil to Burghley, 14 March 1588, SP 77/2 ff.240-241r-v.

<sup>54</sup> Cecil to Burghley, 14 March 1588, SP 77/2 f.240r-v.

way and most rainy; yet he is very well and was honourably used by the duke.<sup>55</sup> He went on to write a glowing report once Cecil had left the commission: 'Touching Mr. Cecil I cannot write anything but that I am assured he loveth and liketh me and he is assured I love and like him; and your lordship hath great cause to rejoyce in him'.<sup>56</sup> Andrea de Loo, a Dutch representative at the talks, also told Burghley of the opinion that Cecil had left on him and de Champagney, councillor of state and governor of Antwerp: he had 'conceived the highest opinion of him. He would be welcome for his good judgment, but he should come soon because it would help the business and he would advise you of what is passing with us'.<sup>57</sup>

Cecil's travels through France in 1584 and the Low Countries in 1588 can be seen as an example of the way in which sons of the noble and gentry classes gained the experience and the skills which were prerequisites of crown service. Elizabeth Williamson, in her article on the intelligence role played by the educational traveller in the late sixteenth century, notes that travel of this kind was part of both the training expected and the activity undertaken for those wishing to gain a salaried position in crown service.<sup>58</sup> Williamson also cites William Bourne's book, *The Treasure for Traueilers* (1578) which highlights the importance of travellers in providing important intelligence on the countries that they were travelling through. This could include topics such as the laws enacted within these countries or states, the nature of the native people, the maintenance of the towns or cities and what strength of arms the princes or nobles of any particular state could bring to bear in times of war.<sup>59</sup>

It is not inconceivable that Cecil may have read or been partly influenced by this advice when he underwent his own journeys abroad. Indeed, he not only provided useful intelligence for Sir Francis Walsingham, and most likely gained a useful patron, he also commented frequently

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<sup>55</sup> Dr Valentine Dale to Burghley, 14 March 1588, *CSPF*, January-June 1588, vol. 21, p. 196.

<sup>56</sup> Dr Valentine Dale to Burghley, 12 April 1588, *CSPF*, January-June 1588, vol. 21, p. 284.

<sup>57</sup> Andrea de Loo to Burghley, 21 June 1588, *CSPF*, January-June 1588, vol. 21, p. 510.

<sup>58</sup> Elizabeth Williamson, 'Fishing after News' and the *Ars Apodemica*: The Intelligencing Role of the Educational Traveller in the Late Sixteenth Century', in Joad Raymond and Noah Moxham (eds.), *News Networks in Early Modern Europe* (Brill, 2016), pp. 545, 551-2.

<sup>59</sup> William Bourne, *A booke called the Treasure for Traveilers, devided into five Bookes or partes, contayning very necessary matters, for all sortes of Travailers, eyther by Sea or by Lande*, written by William Bourne (London, 1578); Williamson, 'Fishing after News', p. 543.

in his letters to his father whilst travelling on the state of the cities and towns held by both the Allies and the Spanish. For example, he provided his father with useful eyewitness intelligence of the state of the enemy forces around the Spanish held areas of Bruges and Antwerp. According to him the enemy 'hath been above 7 or 8000, that lie in quarters between Bruges and Antwerp; besides the continual garrisons he hath above 30,000 men in those parts with those that he has sent towards Bonn. There is no day that he baketh not 50000 loaves, they are relieved every week with lendings'. He also gave an insight into the state of the morale of the Spanish troops, 'now they are in hope of some pay, for the day I arrived at Antwerp there arrived a ton of gold, whereof there was great joy for the safe coming, which they greatly suspected. Money is as scant with them as in other places ...'<sup>60</sup> Cecil also kept Burghley up to date with the state of the fortifications of those towns held by England's Dutch allies. Whilst visiting Brill with Peregrine Bertie, Baron Willoughby, commander-in-chief of the English forces, Cecil reported that 'there is a notable beginning of a new fortification about the town done by the States, whom my lord hath earnestly and long importuned till they began it, which is so forward now as it will be ended by the next summer'.<sup>61</sup> Similarly to the task he had performed for Walsingham whilst he had been in France, Cecil notified Burghley as to the size of the Duke of Parma's army and the people of high importance within his entourage. Again Burghley would have known this sort of information from his various other sources, but this sort of exercise allowed Cecil to demonstrate that he could distinguish who was who amongst the Habsburg military elite, what their titles and military positions were and any rumours of who was in favour and who was not.<sup>62</sup> This was the type of information that Cecil would need to know if he wanted to become principal secretary in the future.

Cecil's experiences during 1584 and 1588 show that his education and training for his future career as a civil servant was typical of many of his contemporaries. It must be admitted that he gained these opportunities because of the political influence and reach of his father but it

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<sup>60</sup> Cecil to Burghley, 19 March 1588, *CSPF*, January- June 1588, vol. 21, pp. 207-8.

<sup>61</sup> Cecil to Burghley, 27 March 1588, *CSPF*, January- June 1588, vol. 21, p. 225.

<sup>62</sup> Cecil to Burghley, 9 April 1588, *CSPF*, January- June 1588, vol. 21, pp. 274-75.

was what he did with these opportunities which made him stand out. For example, his insistence of living amongst the Parisians in order to better grasp the French language tells us of his determination and self-confidence, especially since he declined the comforts of the ambassador's lodgings. Likewise, during his time in the Low Countries he made the most of the fact that he was the son of Lord Burghley to gain access to meetings and audiences to leading figures such as the duke of Parma that another would have been barred from. Importantly, within these audiences he demonstrated his ability to deal with powerful intimidating figures (especially for a twenty-five year old), a scenario in which he could easily have been out of his depth.

### Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the importance of Cecil's upbringing and education and the values and behaviour instilled in him by Burghley. This formal and informal education taught the young Cecil what was expected of him and how to carry himself once he had entered Elizabethan high society. Likewise, the crucial lessons were he must have taken away from his trips abroad was how to act as a statesman, when to keep one's counsel, and what to give away during conversations. Additionally, he learnt how to juggle the opinions of different factions so that one does not overpower the other, and that it was important to cultivate allies amongst foreign officials, as this would give him an advantage over his political rivals when further opportunities for foreign embassies arose. Having begun to establish himself within the spheres of the Elizabethan elite Cecil's next stage in his political career would introduce him to the challenges of espionage and also the many opportunities for power and influence that could come from acquiring an effective intelligence network.

## Chapter 2: Robert Cecil's Early Intelligence Career, 1590-1593

The two most significant events in Cecil's early intelligence and political career were the death of Sir Francis Walsingham at his house in Seething Lane on 9 April 1590, and Cecil's knighthood and subsequent appointment to the privy council in 1591. Walsingham had been principal secretary since 1573 and had by the early 1580s become Elizabeth's spymaster.<sup>1</sup> His death left both these powerful and influential posts vacant and Burghley quickly saw it as an opportunity to put his second son, Robert Cecil, forward. Since the post of principal secretary also came with the resources to build up an effective intelligence network, it was important to safeguard the Cecils' future that Burghley persuade the queen to appoint Cecil.

Following his appointment to the privy council, Cecil continued to cultivate the friendships and working relationships that were important for any aspiring young courtier to attain if they wanted to gain any serious influence and power at court. A glimpse into Cecil's burgeoning social network can be seen from the letters he received from Sir Henry Unton, who was the Queen's ambassador to France between July 1591 to May 1592.<sup>2</sup> The letters that Unton wrote to Cecil show that he was building up his own status by helping people stay in the good graces of his father and with the queen. In one of Unton's first letters to Cecil he urged him to 'acquainte me with my errors [from] tyme to tyme, and direct my course to presser[ve my] lords favor, wherein you shall onlie ma[ke] [me] happie and bynde me most'.<sup>3</sup> In another letter Unton highlighted (perhaps a little gushingly) 'Your greatness and access to her Majestie dot[h] toly bynde me to you, for you loose noe o[pportunity] to grace me both with her Majestie and my Lord yo[ur] [father]',<sup>4</sup> further emphasising that Cecil was becoming a person of note within the Elizabethan courtly circles.

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<sup>1</sup> Conyers Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, 3 vols, (London 1925).

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Stevenson (eds.), *Henry Unton: Correspondence of Sir Henry Unton, Knight, Ambassador from Queen Elizabeth to Henry IV of France, in the years 1591 to 1592*, (London, 1847).

<sup>3</sup> *Unton Correspondence*, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 62-63.

These letters also show that Cecil was equally keen to foster a working relationship with Unton and so he kept Unton informed of the queen's feelings towards him. The queen, Cecil informed him, was especially pleased about 'your ridinge to the Kinge ... The Queen speakes of it, and tells every boddy. Shee troweth she hathe sente noe foole nor no beggar; with much more in your commendations'.<sup>5</sup> To which Unton replied 'I confesse I am not a littell proude of her Majestie's gracious favor, signified by her letter written with your hande, and onely obteyned by your honorable selfe'.<sup>6</sup> There is also a small hint that the relationship between Cecil and Essex at this point early on in their political careers was cordial as Cecil wrote 'My Lord of Essex is exceedingly well settled in her Majesties grace, and I hope shall shortly receive some apparent marke therof in the eye of the world'.<sup>7</sup> Despite Unton initially enjoying his posting, he quickly became disillusioned with the crippling cost of maintaining his status whilst on embassy and the pressure of trying to maintain a cordial relationship between the Queen and Henry IV that by April 1596 he petitioned for his recall with Cecil acting as one of his main mediators. After a few rejections Elizabeth finally relented and allowed Unton to return to England and it was Cecil who informed him of the good news.<sup>8</sup>

This short period of correspondence between Cecil and Unton demonstrates that even during the early 1590s, prominent members of the Elizabethan political elite were keen to obtain his favour. At this point, this was primarily due to the fact that he was the lord treasurer's son; Cecil was acting as an intermediary between his father, the queen and other members within the privy council and therefore his favour was worth cultivating. Furthermore, Unton's letters also show that Cecil was playing a role, albeit a minor one, in making decisions about the war in France and how the war should be fought.

After Walsingham's death, and with no principal secretary being appointed to take his place, Burghley had taken over the responsibility of intelligence-gathering on an interim basis. His

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pp. 142-143.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp. 153-154.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 287.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp. 4438-439, 443.

first task was to find out the extent of Walsingham's intelligence network and obtain some idea of the cost of maintaining it. To this end in May 1590, Burghley and Sir Thomas Heneage, privy councillor and vice-chamberlain of the household from 1587, drew up an audit of Walsingham's intelligence networks. Contrary to the writings of Robert Beale in his 'A Treatise of the Office of a Councillor and Principal Secretarie to her Ma[jes]tie', William Dixon Acres has provided evidence that the Cecils did not steal Walsingham's papers after his death. In fact, as Walsingham's health began to drastically decline, he shared much of his intelligence on Scottish and Spanish matters in the few years before his death.<sup>9</sup> Significantly for Cecil, he was also allowed to see these documents, especially in Scottish matters, whereby he became aware of the work of Archibald Douglas, who was a mainstay of Walsingham's Scottish intelligence network.<sup>10</sup> However, he did not take part in any decisions involving policy or how this intelligence was used. Nevertheless, Cecil cannot have failed to be impressed with the scale of Walsingham's intelligence networks.<sup>11</sup>

A document headed by Heneage and intended for Burghley shows the extent of Walsingham's intelligence networks. Entitled 'The names of sondrie forren places from whence Mr Secretary Walsingham was wont to receaue his advertisements', it shows how Walsingham had agents in important cities such as Paris, Rouen, Madrid, Lisbon and St Sebastian, the most likely bases for those looking to foment sedition in England to congregate. Interestingly, Walsingham also gained information from a seminary just outside of Paris where English, Scottish and Irish Jesuits were trained. This suggests that Walsingham had been keen to turn Jesuits into sources of information about the enemy, a policy that Burghley and Cecil continued in 1591, as we will see. Other areas covered were towns and cities in Germany, Denmark and the Ottoman Empire, including Constantinople and Tripoli.<sup>12</sup> This extensive network of agents had to be financed, but Burghley and Heneage decided that so large a network was too expensive.

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<sup>9</sup> William Dixon Acres, 'The early political career of Sir Robert Cecil, 1582-1597: some aspects of late Elizabethan secretarial administration', (Unpublished PhD Cambridge, 1992), p.22.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp. 21-23.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pp. 20-23.

<sup>12</sup> 'The names of foreign places from whence Mr. Secretary Walsyngham was accustomed to receive his advertisements of the state of public affairs', May 7 1590, SP 12/232 f.20v

They decided to prioritise the countries and groups with which England was engaged in conflict: Spain, the Low Countries and the English catholic exiles based in Paris. By the end of 1590 they had already decided which of Walsingham's agents were to be kept and which were to be discarded.<sup>13</sup>

During this same period between 1590-91, the question of who should replace Francis Walsingham became hotly contested. Indeed, Cecil's eventual appointment to the privy council was actually a compromise between Burghley and the queen, as she did not think that Cecil had the necessary experience to succeed Walsingham as her principal secretary.<sup>14</sup> There were other more experienced candidates for the role, such as Cecil's own cousin, Edward Wootton, who had been an envoy to Scotland and France; Sir Thomas Wilkes, a Clerk of the Council who had vast experience in public affairs and diplomatic missions; Sir Edward Stafford, who had been ambassador in France; and Edward Dyer, a close friend of Sir Phillip Sidney, whom the queen at first favoured. But none of these candidates had Burghley as an advocate and his special long-established relationship with the queen, which, the Cecils hoped, would gain Cecil the leverage to obtain the appointment. Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, had backed William Davison, but due to his imprisonment and disfavour over the execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587, his candidature was doomed from the start regardless of Essex's patronage.<sup>15</sup>

By November and December 1590 courtiers were speculating that the running for the principal secretaryship was now between just Cecil and Wotton. A correspondent to the Earl of Shrewsbury wrote 'I hope you shall hear that my cousin Robert Cecil shall be sworn Secretary before Christmas: whether Mr Wotton or who else is yet uncertain'.<sup>16</sup> Burghley's chance to put forward the claims of his son came in May 1591 when the queen spent ten days at Theobalds (between 10 and 20 May). Her visit started with a welcoming speech read out by an actor

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<sup>13</sup> Sir Thomas Heneage to Burghley, May 7 1590, SP 12/232 f.19v

<sup>14</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabeth Politics*, pp. 101-03; Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, pp.150-152.

<sup>15</sup> Handover, *The Second Cecil*, p. 72.

<sup>16</sup> Edmund Lodge, *Illustrations of British History*, vol. 2 (3 vols, London, 1791-1838) p. 428; Handover, *The Second Cecil*, p. 74.



disguised as a hermit, who was meant to represent Burghley, and suggested that Burghley wished to retire and put down the burdens of state. The queen's response was to laugh and tell Burghley:

Wee upon advised consideration have commanded you heremit, to your old cave, too good for the forsaken, too bad for our worthily beloved councillor. And because we greatly tender your comfort, we have given power to our chancellor, to make out such and so many writs, as to him shall be thought good ... Wherein we command all causes within the prerogative of our high favour to give you no interruption. And this under the pain aforesaid they shall not omit.<sup>17</sup>

On the 16 May, a playlet was performed involving a dialogue between a gentleman usher and a postman. The dialogue centred around whether the letters that the postman had delivered should be given to the queen herself or her secretary. The postman urged the latter as the letter contained correspondence from a prince in China and the queen might need assistance in reading it. The usher responded by praising the high learning of the queen yet stressing that her burdens could be relieved by the assistance of her secretary.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, these propaganda pieces did not sway the queen to appoint Cecil as her principal secretary but she did offer Burghley the consolation of knighting Cecil on her last day of her visit. More was to come, as during her summer progress through Surrey, Sussex and into Hampshire, on 2 August 1591 at Nonsuch Palace, he was sworn in as a member of the Privy Council.<sup>19</sup> Crucially, however, the queen did not appoint him principal secretary. Cecil would have to wait another five years to finally gain the office. But the fact that he was now on the privy council

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<sup>17</sup> John Strype, *Annals of the Reformation and Establishment of Religion, and other various occurrences in the Church of England, during Queen Elizabeth's Happy Reign: together with an Appendix of original papers of State, Records, and Letters*, vol. 4 (Oxford, 1824) pp. 108-9; Handover, *The Second Cecil*, p. 80.

<sup>18</sup> John Nichols's, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I*, vol. 3, edited by Elizabeth Goldring, Faith Eales, Elizabeth Clarke and Jayne Elisabeth Archer (4 vols, Oxford, 2014) pp. 529-541.

<sup>19</sup> Handover, *The Second Cecil*, pp. 76-77.

offered him the chance, the influence and the opportunities to prove his worth. Also because of this, his new status also brought him new power and prestige when starting out in his intelligence career.

Cecil's first known task at the behest of Burghley and Heneage was to find out the intentions of both Cardinal William Allen and Robert Parsons and the extent to which the other English exiles would actively support another invasion of England. The Cecils also needed to know if the King of Spain, Philip II, the supporter of both Allen and Parsons, would be open to the possibility of peace negotiations. In May 1591, the Cecils were given an unlikely opportunity to achieve their objectives in the form of two Jesuit priests, John Snowden and John Fixer. Their subsequent interviews and questioning can give an insight into how thoroughly Burghley and Cecil vetted important agents into their burgeoning intelligence networks.<sup>20</sup>

John Cecil (alias John Snowden) and John Fixer were Jesuit priests sent to England by Robert Parsons but were intercepted on their voyage from Portugal to Amsterdam by the English navy. Snowden (John Cecil) was about thirty-two and a former fellow of Trinity College, Oxford. No physical description of Snowden survives but Fixer was a tall man with a ruddy complexion and dark features. They were both scholars, could speak foreign languages and had travelled in Italy and Spain. Snowden had been a member of Allen's household.<sup>21</sup> What made these two Jesuits important to the Cecils was their willingness to collaborate with them, that is to gain their freedom in exchange for information about the Tudor state's enemies.

Once captured, both men were sent to Theobalds, Burghley's main house outside of London, where he interrogated them intensively for four days from 21 to 24 May 1591, sifting through their replies to his questions and establishing the facts of their life whilst they were living abroad and whether the information that they were offering was true or false. Burghley then wrote down six questions he wanted answered before he was satisfied about their reliability.

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<sup>20</sup> Interrogations of John Snowden and Thomas Fixer and their answers, SP 12/238, f.242; f.244; f.246; f.255; f.257; f.260; f.274; f. 275; f. 277; f. 278; SP 12/239, f. 19; f.117; CSPD, 1591-1594, pp. 38-43; 45-6; 53.

<sup>21</sup> Alford, *The Watchers*, p. 272.

The first three questions asked why they made the journey into England and how they expected to be supported and maintained. By specifically finding out the means by which Parsons and Allen were smuggling priests into England, Burghley hoped to capture and potentially extract useful intelligence and even turn these seminary priests into double agents, as he was looking to do with Snowden and Fixer. The fourth question asked whether they could devise a way to apprehend other Jesuits coming over into England and what plots Father Parsons had in mind to conspire against England. This question aimed at testing their usefulness in terms of how close they were to Allen and Parsons and their willingness to help capture and detain their fellow Jesuits. The fifth and sixth questions were designed to test their loyalty both to England and to their religion and whether their catholicism would have an impact on them working for a protestant regime even though Elizabeth was their rightful sovereign monarch.<sup>22</sup>

Snowden not only offered Burghley the inner details of Person and Allen's plan to smuggle priests in and out of England and their means of communication but he also highlighted that he was tasked with sounding out as to whether Ferdinando Stanley would be open to pressing his claim to the throne with the help of the disaffected Catholics in England.<sup>23</sup> Ferdinando was to be told to ask for assistance from his cousin, Sir William Stanley, but if he said no then other candidates were to be considered.

Furthermore, Fixer also confirmed that sounding out Lord Strange was part of their mission and that they had received their instructions from Sir Francis Englefield, Stanley and Parsons to assure any English Catholics that they came across that Philip II only intended to reform their religion and not to conquer them. Additionally Fixer and Snowden were also to tell disaffected Catholics that when the invasion did come, that they should take possession of a defensible port to assist the Spanish in their landings.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Six interrogatories by Lord Burghley, for the examination of John Snowden and John Fixer, May 22 1591, SP 12/238 f.252v.

<sup>23</sup> John Snowden [to Lord Burghley], 26 May 1591, SP 12/238 f.227r-v.

<sup>24</sup> John Fixer [to Cecil?] 21 May 1591, SP 12/238 f.162 r-v.

As we shall see in chapter three, this confession had profound consequences for Richard Hesketh's attempt to do the same thing a few years later and would explain how he was allowed entry into England so easily. The Cecils knew that Allen and Parsons along with the English renegades, Sir Francis Englefield and Sir William Stanley, all planned to sound out the possibility of deposing Elizabeth through an invasion by sea, and replacing her with Ferdinando Stanley, then Lord Strange, whom the catholic nobility could rally around and raise forces to support their invasion. But, by having been forewarned in 1591, the Cecils could now keep a close eye on those coming in from Europe who had either Jesuit connections or affiliations with the Stanleys, and thus might seek an audience with Ferdinando Stanley, or the Stanley family.

This was put to good use, as the following year, Cecil received a report from one Reynold Boseley, an agent in the Low Countries, who reported on Stanley's movements. This included the raising of a new regiment of Walloons to support the Duke of Parma and meetings between Stanley and Allen.<sup>25</sup> Burghley, for his part, received the greater share of intelligence about Stanley by employing a number of agents within the Low Countries to send intelligence of Stanley's movements and his contacts.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, Thomas Phelippes, at this time working for Essex's burgeoning intelligence network, also had William Sterrell commenting on Stanley. The consensus of these reports was that Stanley and Allen were meeting throughout the year 1592 and that some sort of action against England was being mooted, with Ferdinando Stanley being nominated as a prime candidate to cause insurrection within the country.<sup>27</sup> As a further security measure, Lord Cobham posted orders to his watchers at the Cinque Ports that the persons of Stanley, his captains and lieutenants, and eight priests (presumably these included

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<sup>25</sup> Reinold Boseley [to Cecil?], 7 April 1592, SP 12/241 f.182-83 r-v; Notes of the examination of Reynold Boseley [by Thomas Phelippes], 25 July 1592, SP12/242 f.161r.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Jeffries to Burghley, 7 August 1592, SP 12/242 f.191r; Thomas Christopher to Burghley, SP 12/242 f.207r; SP 12/242 ff.214-218 r-v.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Phelippes to Sterrell, *CSPD*, 1591-1594, vol. 241, pp. 169, 183-84, 217-18, 222-23, 227-29.

Allen, Parsons and Owen) were to be arrested if caught trying to enter England via these ports.<sup>28</sup>

Out of the two, it was Snowden who provided more inside knowledge of the inner circles of the Jesuits' movement against England. He also was not afraid to tell Burghley his conditions for working for the Elizabethan government. Snowden was adamant that he could still be both a practising catholic and a loyal subject to the queen. Furthermore, he criticised the Elizabethan state's policy of executing any Jesuit priest captured within England for treason, warning that 'in place of one put to death, 10 come in from the seminaries, and 20 go over to the seminaries and their martyrdom is the greatest service to opponents abroad, for accounts are printed, painted, and published, and princes are moved to compassion. Parsons gapes after some such windfall, to give credit to his new seminary'.<sup>29</sup> Snowden then outlined a plan to bring over the seminaries and priests by offering toleration of loyal catholics. Burghley, however, remained noncommittal about this; he was more interested in how he could use both Snowden and Fixer to his best advantage.<sup>30</sup> These letters between Snowden and Burghley provide an interesting snap-shot of the relationship between a high ranking government official and the spies who worked under him. It shows that potential spies could make demands not just for payment, but also about the ethical basis of their employment; by criticising the government's and indeed Burghley's policy, Snowden was demonstrating that he would not be a meek employee of the Elizabethan state, blindly following whatever task Burghley set him, but his own man with his own views on how the missions assigned to him should be conducted. In spite of this, Burghley's non reply on Snowden's moral lecturing tells us that he saw himself firmly in charge, no matter what ethical opinions those working under him may have had.

Once Burghley was satisfied about Snowden and Fixer's credibility as spies, he passed them on to Cecil, who became their handler. This can be deduced by the letters that Snowden wrote

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Russell to Mr Mills, April 1592, SP 12/241 ff. 208-209 r-v.

<sup>29</sup> John Snowden to Burghley 22 May 1591, *CSPD*, 1591-94, vol. 238, pp. 42-44.

<sup>30</sup> Alford, *The Watchers*, p. 276.

to Cecil after the interrogations in May. Snowden only wanted to correspond with him and not Burghley, perhaps because of the rough questioning that he had been subjected to. A letter dated 1 June 1591 from Snowden to Cecil relates to both Snowden and Fixer's warrants and the wording of their passports to leave England and go to the continent. Snowden insisted that he could not in good conscience falsely accuse any catholic of treason unless that person had actually perpetrated treason themselves. In effect he wanted assurances from Burghley that Snowden would be allowed to use his discretion as to who he deemed as being the enemy and not to blanket all catholic priests as such.<sup>31</sup> Cecil replied the same day reassuring Snowden that he had shown his letter to his father and that he would sign off on the passports presently. However, Cecil stressed that since his father was but a subject, he could not overrule the present law against Jesuit priests; only the queen herself could overturn the law. He sternly reminded Snowden 'he ought, therefore, to content himself with what his Lordship promises, that whenever he resorts amongst catholics, and is received by them for conscience only, and avoids needless frequenting of them, his Lordship will ever be an intercessor to the queen, of whose mercy he need not doubt'. Cecil then ended the letter by reminding Snowden of

ye greatest proof of yo[u]r loialty and yo[u]r fellowes depends uppon your own assertions, it is to expectid at yo[u]r hands yt this great favour shewed you, must bring forth good fruit w[i]th profitable correspondency for her M[ajes]ties service and yo[u]r contries good w[hi]ch is the trew end of your Inlargement, and the cause of this Extraordinary Favour w[hi]ch many others do thirst for.<sup>32</sup>

In other words, the only way to remain in Burghley's good graces and to prove their loyalty was to provide the Cecils with accurate and useful intelligence, as there were other men looking for opportunities for the same patronage. Clearly here then while on the one hand Cecil was trying to follow on from his father's example of keeping a firm control over his agents,

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<sup>31</sup> S[nowden] to [Cecil], 2 June 1591, SP 12/ 239 f.3r-v.

<sup>32</sup> C[ecil] to Snowden, 3 June 1591, SP 12/239 f.5r-v.

he was also at the same time conscious of the need to offer them reassurance and to keep their morale up so that they did not feel the need to defect or transfer their loyalty to England's enemies.

Snowden and Fixer continued to provide intelligence on the Jesuit machinations throughout June and July 1591 but then the paper trail disappears until 1592, when Snowden appears in Rome. He was then sent into Scotland until early 1594. Snowden worked alongside Fixer in reporting to Cecil the Spanish political and military thinking and the efforts of the catholic exiles in Scotland. However, his activities with the Elizabethan government were discovered in 1599 when he was publicly named as Burghley's spy, an accusation which he denied in his own printed reply. He continued to act as a spy for the Elizabethan government right up to the queen's death in 1603. Thomas Fixer's fate, however, is not documented.<sup>33</sup>

With Spain and Rome now partly covered, Burghley and Cecil's attention turned to recruiting potential agents who could keep them abreast of the plots emanating from Brussels, most notably from the catholic intelligencer Hugh Owen<sup>34</sup>, Sir William Stanley and his regiment and the Jesuit Henry Walpole<sup>35</sup>, Stanley's chaplain. The English emigres in the Low Countries were the source of many plots against the Elizabethan government during the 1590s, especially after Allen's death in February 1594. Robert Poley came to Heneage and the Cecils' attention because he was an experienced intelligencer, previously used by Walsingham during

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<sup>33</sup> Alford, *The Watchers*, pp. 283-84; Robert Parsons to John Cecil and John Fixer, 13 April 1591, *HMCS*, 1590-94, vol 4, p.104.

<sup>34</sup> Hugh Owen was born in Wales in 1538 and raised as a Catholic. He became involved in the Ridolfi plot in 1571 and had to flee England: by 1572 he was in Brussels as a Spanish pensioner. He gathered together a network of agents in England and used Welshmen in English regiments to further Spanish military plans there. He was involved in many of the plots during the 1590s against Elizabeth and had some part in the Gunpowder Plot. The Elizabethan and later Jacobean governments increasingly wanted him extradited back to England but these attempts were always thwarted. He died in 1618 in the English college in Rome. See Dodd, A. H., (1959). Owen family of Plas-du, Caernarfonshire. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* from <https://biography.wales/article/s-OWEN-PLA-1550>.

<sup>35</sup> Henry Walpole was baptised in Docketing, Norfolk, in 1558. He was raised as a catholic but only became radicalised when he attended the execution of Edmund Campion in 1581. Whereupon he travelled to the English college in Rome in 1583 and was ordained as a Jesuit priest in Paris in 1588. In June 1593 Parsons told Walpole that he intended to send him on the English mission. Taking ship from St Omer they were blown off course and landed in Yorkshire and were swiftly captured. He was tortured by Richard Topcliffe and confessed to being a Jesuit and was hanged, drawn and quartered in York on 17 April 1595. He was canonised as in 1970 by Pope Paul VI as one of the forty martyrs of England and Wales. See Henry Walpole, 1558-1595, Jesuit and martyr, *ODNB*.

the Babington Plot, and also because he already had a network of his own spies in place who could gather information for him. This network can be illustrated by the letters of Poley's ciphers that have survived. One letter details the contact points of his network for example:

Directions of letters to Ro: Pooley – Jacob Mynistrale Italiano; Arnold Mulemake, Jewller.

Directions of letters from Ro: Po[ley] – Elizabeth Boogarde in den Lyllye in den Augustine Street, Antwerpen; Harman Van der Myll, jeweller, op den Dame, Antwerpen.<sup>36</sup>

Unfortunately, there is no surviving letter from any of these correspondence; most likely the letters were either burned or simply lost. Nevertheless, at the very least the survival of this part of Poley's network and the accompanying ciphers show that by 1590 (the date of the ciphers) there was already a rudimentary system in place, for the receiving and passing on of intelligence that Heneage and the Cecils could tap into.

The only problem was that Poley had become known as a Walsingham agent during the exposure of the Babington plot so there was a need to find an agent who could successfully integrate himself within Stanley and Owen's group without raising suspicion. On 18 December 1590, Heneage received a letter from a Michael Moody requesting employment in either France or Spain.<sup>37</sup> Moody was implicated in the Stafford Plot of 1587 in which the perpetrators had allegedly planned to assassinate the queen by placing a bag of gunpowder under her bed. This was proved to be untrue and was primarily meant to embarrass the French ambassador. Unfortunately for Moody, he was sent to the Tower and only released in late 1590. Thus, needing work, he sought the patronage of Heneage who directed him to Robert Poley. Moody also applied to Burghley, stating that he could get letters of commendation from the Catholics and that he could obtain for Cecil 'more intelligence from abroad than queen or Council have, without charge'. This again suggests that Cecil was at this time involved in Burghley and

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<sup>36</sup> Robert Poley Cipher, SP 106/ 2/73b, CSP, Ciphers, Elizabeth I, 1- 1791 (up to 1603), vol. 2, p.8; Martin, *Elizabethan Espionage*, p. 65.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Moody to Heneage, 18 December 1590, HMCS, 1590-94, vol. 4, p. 77.



Heneage's new intelligence network and that others knew about his involvement. Moody then went on to state his reason for offering his service as he wanted to regain the credit that he had lost whilst he had been working under Walsingham in France..<sup>38</sup>

Poley already had a front in London in place to pass on the letters which Moody would write to him. This front was a broker called Robert Rutkin who, in his statement written in April 1591, detailed how Moody, under his alias Bar Riche, relayed the intelligence that he had discovered by using trading terminology such as brawn, sturgeon or oysters. Rutkin would then pass on these letters to Poley, who was his neighbour in Shoreditch, and then Poley would pass on Moody's letters to Heneage and the Cecils.<sup>39</sup>

Once Moody had travelled to Brussels in October 1591 he began to insinuate himself into Hugh Owen's household and began sending back intelligence to Poley via Rutkin. Moody also received instructions from Poley ordering him to find out the terms by which and by whom that Moody is so confident that Philip II would make peace with the queen and whether Lords Dacres and Norton and the Earl of Westmoreland intend to devise a plan to invade England. Moody was also to find out whether Sir William Stanley planned to land troops in Ireland.<sup>40</sup>

'Dacres' refers to Francis Dacres, the youngest son of William Dacres, third Baron Dacre of Gisland, who was involved in the 1569 Northern rising and followed his father into exile after its failure. The Earl of Westmoreland was Charles Neville, sixth Earl of that title, who helped lead the Northern rising and also opted for exile. 'Norton' refers to George Norton who was one of five sons to Richard Norton who had helped plan the rising. The objectives that were detailed in this letter are similar to those that the Cecils and Heneage wanted to discover back in May 1590.

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<sup>38</sup> Moody to Burghley, 18 May 1591, SP 12/238 f.234r.

<sup>39</sup> Deposition of Robert Rutkin, broker, April? 1591 SP 12/238 f.208r; Charles Nicholl, *The Reckoning: The Murder of Christopher Marlowe* (London, 1992), pp. 299-300.

<sup>40</sup> Poley to Moody, October 1591, *HMCS*, 1590-94, vol. 4, p.156.

Cecil's role in this transitional intelligence network at this stage was as the junior figure. It was Burghley and Heneage who set the policy and the objectives of England's intelligence network. Cecil was charged with keeping an eye on Moody as Burghley and Heneage, quite rightly, did not completely trust an agent who had been implicated a plot on the queen's life. Even though there is no direct evidence that either Heneage or Burghley asked Cecil to do this, Burghley had told Heneage how Moody had falsely passed himself off as one of his agents in order to gain access to the Duke of Parma and he had even used Burghley's own name to gain patronage and money, all without his own permission.<sup>41</sup> It seems that the queen was also mistrustful of Moody's motives therefore it seems likely that this was the reason why Cecil appointed John Ricroft to spy on Moody.

Throughout August and September 1591, Cecil corresponded with John Ricroft, who was sent over to the Low Countries to keep Cecil informed of Moody's whereabouts and loyalties.<sup>42</sup> Ricroft's findings are summed up by a document in Cecil's hand entitled 'Collections owt of the Declaration [of] Rycroft made to me of Moody his bad proceedings'. This document details that once Moody had arrived in Brussels, he went straight to Cosmo, the secretary of the Duke of Parma, and told him 'all Particularities of trust committed unto him here, He revealed the Ciphre. He gave them warning of Plankney [English agent] at Bruxells, and jeffrays [English agent] at Calis [of] any thing els he knew of the state here'.<sup>43</sup> Moody was also alleged to have done whatever he could to disrupt any support sent to France and in Scotland, to have surveyed Portsmouth, to 'practise Don Pedros escape, He will likewise practise the Erle of Ar: [Arundel] Escape'.<sup>44</sup> Lastly, Moody planned to entice Ricroft to betray the town of Bergen to the Spanish and then to send him to Middleburg, where Owen would send him money. Moody would carry two forged letters with him when he next entered England, one would contain

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<sup>41</sup> Burghley to Heneage, 12 Oct 1591, *HMCS*, 1590-94, vol. 4, p. 147.

<sup>42</sup> John Ricroft to Cecil, 7, 11 and 17 August 1591, SP 12/239 f.182r; SP 12/239 f.206r; SP 12/239 f.221r.

<sup>43</sup> 'Collections owt of the Declaration [of] Rycroft made to me of Moody his bad proceedings' [in Cecil's hand], August 1591, SP 12/239 f.222-223r-v.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, SP 12/239 f.222r.

assurance of aid from the Jesuits in Rome for the Catholic nobles in Scotland and another that Sir William Stanley would send men to Ireland. The letter continues

At the writing of all these forged l[ette]rs Rycroft was present. It may be he will alledge, yt this w[hi]ch Rycroft accuseth him of, without witness is meerly fals, To yt may be answered, yt if his meaning had bene good he wold never have imparted so much of his secretts to Rycroft, but yt he fought to draw him into the Complott. If he say yt he did this /only/ to intrapp him, then may the trewth of yt appeare, if he have informed any thing against this man [Ricroft], for els what now he shall say, comes very late, for this man had the start of him.<sup>45</sup>

This sort of duplicity was what Burghley and Cecil must have expected when dealing men and women whose first priority was to their own profit and security. Cecil would have to come to terms with this reality throughout his career as head of an intelligence-gathering network. Cecil must have shown Burghley this document as, later on in October when Moody was trying to persuade the governor of Flushing, Sir Robert Sidney, that he could turn Hugh Owen to work against the catholic cause, Burghley stepped in to inform Sidney that he was to cease communications with Moody and Owen. This decision took two months, indicating that Burghley and Heneage, along with the queen, were deeply suspicious about Moody's true loyalties and decided to be cautious.<sup>46</sup> It is clear that from his early days on the privy council, Cecil was already involved in intelligence gathering activities and used a number of agents to obtain the information that he needed.

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<sup>45</sup> Declaration of Ricroft, August? 1591, SP 12/239 f.182r; Account of the chief points in Ricroft's declaration of Moody's bad proceedings, written by Cecil, August 1591, *CSPD*, 1591-94, vol. 240, p. 92.

<sup>46</sup> Nicholls, *The Reckoning*, pp. 304-5; Hugh Owen to Sir Robert Sidney, SP 12/240 f.92r.

### Cecil's surveillance of English Catholics 1590-93

Cecil was also increasingly involved in the surveillance of catholic recusants in the years after Walsingham's death. His contacts and correspondence with the likes of Richard Cholmeley, John Barcroft and Benjamin Beard demonstrate this. Richard Cholmeley grew up in Lancashire alongside many catholic tainted gentry such as the Stanleys, Pooles, and Savages. Richard's father Hugh served the government at a local level in Cheshire. Hugh Cholmeley had also worked with Walsingham in the 1580s to examine captured seminary priests, such as Thomas Holford. In 1588 he was one of the muster-masters recruiting troops in preparations for the coming Spanish armada; during this work he came under the command of Ferdinando Stanley, then Lord Strange. Therefore, Richard Cholmeley and his father had a history of being secret catholics whilst also demonstrating their loyalty by taking on important judicial roles in their locality. Richard Cholmeley first appeared as an anti-catholic agent when on 13 May 1591 an arrest warrant was issued for one Thomas Dury and two men described as his companions, one of whom was Cholmeley. Dury was charged on 15 May and sentenced to be kept in the Marshalsea whilst Cholmeley was released and in fact paid £6 on 29 July for assisting in the arrest of Dury alongside his colleague James Burrage.<sup>47</sup>

Cecil's first known involvement with Richard Cholmeley came in January 1592, when, along with his brother Hugh, Richard Cholmeley was tasked with entrapping William Shelley of Michelgrove in Sussex. Shelley was a staunch old catholic who had helped to shelter Father Parsons during his first mission in England and had spent a spell in the Tower. In a letter from Hugh to Cecil, Hugh complained that Richard had used him to gain access to Cecil and had tried to exclude him from any rewards for their work. The argument centred around a man called Stronge, who may have been the Cholmeley brothers' entry into some catholic circle. 'After my brother [Richard] had obtained Stronge's consent to these services, he not knowing how to have them so surely & honestly performed as by myself, did acquaint me with the whole

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<sup>47</sup> Nicholl, *The Reckoning*, pp. 332; J.R. Dasent (ed.), *Acts of the Privy Council*, 1542-1604, (32 vols, 1890-1907), vol. 21, pp. 119, 291, 354; Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, p. 198.

secrecy thereof, & told me that my part would be worth £500, further requiring me to write his first & and second letters unto Your Honour, the which I did'.<sup>48</sup>

Hugh then went on to say that Richard intended to cut him out completely and that it was on Cecil's orders. Richard 'did take occasion to bring me word that Your Honour would not have me deal any more in such causes, the which message I know was altogether mistaken, or rather by himself devised'. Hugh's grievances seems justified as in the chamber accounts, there is listed 'Richard Chomley, gent' as having been paid, 20 nobles (£6 13s 4d), but Hugh is not mentioned.<sup>49</sup> This payment must have been for the entrapment of William Shelley, and Hugh's letter also tells us how they managed the arrest. 'At Mr Shelley's I played the prologue in the resemblance of a priest, & immediately in another proportion did with my brother Garmond perform the action, first causing my brother Richard Cholmley to confess in friendship that, upon stomach, he had before wronged me unto Your Honour'.<sup>50</sup>

This episode highlights some of the difficulties that Cecil faced in the management of government agents: disagreements about who was to get the credit, money and how these surveillance operations were to be carried out. Cecil seems to have been an aloof manager, as Hugh mentioned 'Your Honour's misliking of our hasty indiscrete coming, to bring tidings for the accomplishment thereof'.<sup>51</sup> This was probably because Cecil did not want the Cholmeley brothers to be associated with him and thus make the recusant catholics they were infiltrating suspicious of them. Quite possibly Cecil or Burghley and Heneage (who controlled payment) thought that Richard and not Hugh had been the most deserving of a reward.

John Snowden and Thomas Wilson were not the only catholic priests whom Cecil had contact with. Upon his capture the Jesuit John Barcroft was interrogated by Cecil and Richard Young JP in December 1591. The questions that Cecil asked him focused upon finding out if he knew

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<sup>48</sup> Hugh Cholmeley to Sir Robert Cecil, 19 January 1592, *CSPD*, 1591-94, vol. 241, p. 173; Nicholl, *The Reckoning*, p. 335.

<sup>49</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, p. 198.

<sup>50</sup> Hugh Cholmeley to Cecil, 19 January 1592, *CSPD*, 1591-94, vol. 241, p.173.

<sup>51</sup> SP 12/241 f.49r; Nicholl, *The Reckoning*, p. 336.

of any other Jesuits priests who were sheltering in England and who they were being sheltered by. To which Barcroft replied the only Jesuits that he knows of who are at liberty in England were two brothers, whose name is Soulks and they were born in Lancashire and one was an attorney and the other had lived in Kent. The house in Lancashire that would shelter them belongs to a Mr Yates and his family are full of recusants. He then went on to list the Jesuits that he knew of who were either still at liberty in England or captured which included, Robert Woodroft, John Bolton, Robert Nutter (who was a prisoner in Wisbech). Barcroft also named Jesuits who were operating in Europe and that they were all ex pupils of Mr Yates.<sup>52</sup> This was why capturing a Jesuit was so important: they could then reveal names and locations where other Jesuits or catholic gentry and nobles in the localities were secretly supporting them. At the very least these names could be checked and catalogued. It also suggests that since Cecil's appointment to the privy council he had started to take a more active role, alongside Richard Young, in the questioning of important religious prisoners, both Jesuits and recusants. It was also important to gain some leverage over the prisoner, as part of Cecil's questions and Barcroft's replies centred around his brother Thomas and his activities as a Jesuit; to which John Barcroft replied that he had not seen or did not know what became of his brother.<sup>53</sup>

It may have been because of this leverage that Barcroft offered his services to help find and capture his fellow Jesuits to escape punishment. In fact, Sir Owen Hopton, the long serving lieutenant of the Tower and MP for Suffolk, gave his endorsement in employing Barcroft. Hopton knew Barcroft as a 'honr[a]ble man and suche a one is willing to app[re]hende Jesuits, Seminaries or missinge priests and other fugitive[s] that run from their nativ[e] contrey and dutifull obedience to her maj[es]tie and her lawes' .<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately, there is no reply from Cecil as to whether he accepted Barcroft's offer for his services.

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<sup>52</sup> Eighteen interrogatories [by Cecil for John Barcroft], to which the following is a reply, December 1591, *CSPD*, 1591-1594, vol. 240, pp. 150-151.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Sir Owen Hopton to Cecil, 12 June 1592, SP 12/242 f.95r.

Another avenue of intelligence which Cecil was beginning to explore was to place informers in the prominent prisons within London to spy on imprisoned recusants and get them to reveal incriminating information. One such informer was a Benjamin Beard, who was serving time in the Fleet prison for amassing a debt of £280. The recusant that Cecil wanted Beard to inform on was a Mrs. Shelly (possibly the wife of or a relative of William Shelley, whom the Cholmeley brothers had entrapped). Cecil wanted Mrs. Shelly to be given freedom of movement around the prison so as to spy on her more easily; however, this led to friction between Cecil and the Warden of the prison.<sup>55</sup> Cecil wanted to get Beard situated as close as he could to Mrs. Shelly, but again the Warden frustrated him. Eventually he obtained the warden's consent, allowing Beard to spy with impunity. Beard then complicated matters by asking Cecil to set up a secret system whereby a Mr Thompson conveyed Mrs Shelly's correspondence out of the Fleet. This does not appear to have been taken up but Shelly was removed briefly to the warden's house so that her correspondence could be examined. Beard was still pursuing Mrs Shelly until January 1594 and then he disappears from the record; probably Cecil had gleaned all he could from her correspondence.<sup>56</sup>

Through his short dealings with Beard, Cecil would have realised how difficult it could be to plant an agent within the London prisons and to be able to keep his true purpose secret from the authorities. Cecil also started using debtors as they were easily recruited for promises of either a reduction in the debt or a speedy release from prison. The incidents with Barcroft and Beard show that Cecil was acting in accordance with the objectives which Burghley and Heneage had set out in May 1590: to keep a closer eye on recusants and Jesuit priests who could prove a threat to the Elizabethan government. For though neither Barcroft or Beard were used or employed for a long time, it demonstrates that Cecil was at least starting to act with a degree of initiative in recruiting and interrogating potential agents for the post-Walsingham intelligence network.

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<sup>55</sup> Benjamin Beard to Cecil, 5 December 1593, *HMCS*, 1590-1594, vol. 4, pp. 429-30.

<sup>56</sup> Jane Shelly to Benjamin Beard, 9 December 1593; Benjamin Beard to Cecil, 12 December 1593, *HMCS*, 1590-1594, vol. 4, pp. 432-3; Acres, 'Sir Robert Cecil', pp. 37-40.

The years 1590-93, in which Cecil was starting out on his intelligence career, were therefore a transitional period in which Burghley and Heneage chose to scale down the Elizabethan intelligence network after Walsingham's death. Instead of a wide-ranging network like that of Walsingham's, Burghley's network primarily covered the areas of Rome, Spain and the Low Countries. These were the areas which Burghley and Heneage believed that the threats to destabilise the Elizabethan state would come from. To this end, they employed agents such as Moody and Snowden in these strategically placed locations to monitor the movements and machinations of those such as William Allen and the renegade Sir William Stanley. These agents were not as well paid as those who had worked under Walsingham had been. In fact, as the lengthy interrogations of John Snowden and Thomas Wilson attest, Burghley would withhold passports and funds until he was completely satisfied that the intelligence that they provided was useful.

Cecil's role in the foreign side of this new intelligence network can be defined as subordinate. He played a major role in corresponding with Snowden and conveying his father's instructions to Snowden and also informing his father of Snowden's problems or grievances. Nevertheless, since he was by far the junior figure alongside his father and Heneage, it was only natural that Cecil would assume a secondary role. This did mean that he gained experience in corresponding and dealing with agents and all their problems and complaints, and also the firm hand that was needed to make sure agents were reminded of the tasks they were set.

Conversely, Cecil had a much more active role in the domestic sphere. Here we can see him supervising government agents to infiltrate catholic circles such as the Cholmeley brothers. This was not a comprehensive network but it indicates a willingness by Cecil to get involved with one of the key areas of concern for Burghley and Heneage and to prove his worth. His aim to place agents within the London prisons was, as shown by the case of Benjamin Beard, to prove both problematic and sometimes fruitless. But this was an often practised technique of gaining valuable intelligence on known catholic and recusant circles going back to the Walsingham days. The use of the Cholmeley brothers and Beard show that Cecil was keen to



recruit those whose families had connections in catholic areas of the country and in local government service, meaning that they had a higher chance of being accepted into these secret underground groups. Debtors were also frequently used for spies in prisons. In sum, in the period between 1590 to 1593 we can see Cecil gaining a grounding in what it would take to run an intelligence network both at home and abroad.

### Conclusion

Cecil had started to become more involved in the inner working of the Elizabethan government upon becoming a member of the privy council, both in the domestic and foreign sphere, where he could bring to bear a greater deal of his own influence and prestige. However, his rise was slowed somewhat by the queen's reluctance to appoint someone as young as himself to be her new principal secretary and her choice instead was to rely on Burghley. Cecil did however use the years 1590-1592 to increase his social contacts and improve his standing at court. As the Unton correspondence demonstrates, courtiers and elites increasingly saw Cecil as an important and influential figure whose patronage was worth cultivating. He was also learning the skills and patience that he would need when he created his own intelligence gathering network. Through Burghley and Heneage, he began to see that it was difficult to know who to trust with employment and also how to balance financial constraints with the need to cover as many important towns and cities as possible. Alongside this, Cecil gained experience in managing agents and dealing with their varied issues and needs. In the next few years Cecil would have the chance to showcase the skills he had acquired under the tutelage of Burghley and Heneage with the emergence of a number of plots against the queen's life perpetrated by enemies both at home and abroad.

### Chapter 3: The Plots of 1593-1595

During November 1593 Richard Hesketh, a catholic, merchant and soldier, was executed for his part in a plot to remove Elizabeth from the throne and to replace her with a catholic, and crucially male, candidate who would have the support of Spain and Rome. Hesketh's death would not be the last; in fact, there were a number of plots discovered by members of the privy council up until the spring of 1594. The perpetrators were thought to have been a mixture of Spanish agents, Jesuits and disaffected renegade English soldiers. It was in these tumultuous months that Cecil began to find his feet as an Elizabethan privy councillor and to assert himself as an effective political operator, interrogator and manipulator of events. The four plots that were discovered during these months were named for the men who were unfortunate enough to be caught. The Hesketh plot occurred during September to November 1593; the second plot involving four Irishmen, William Polwhele, Patrick Cullen, John Annias and Hugh Cahill, came to light in December 1593 and lasted until February 1594. The best-known plot, involving Dr Rodrigo Lopez, was investigated by the Earl of Essex between February and April 1594, and lastly, the Edmund Yorke and Richard Williams conspiracy began in June 1594 and carried on until the following year. It is surprising that the 1590s are not necessarily remembered as a period of frequent plots as the 1580s have been by historians.

The aim of this chapter is not to examine each phase of the plot step by step or to give a definitive answer as to who was guilty and who was innocent, as this has already been done in previous works by historians.<sup>1</sup> Instead, the role that Sir Robert Cecil and his associates played during these events will be the focus. The interrogation processes were an important indicator as to whether either the Earl of Essex or the Cecils were in the political ascendancy, as each group wanted to get their particular associates dominating the interrogation and then

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Edwards, *Plots and Plotters in the reign of Elizabeth I* (Dublin, 2002); Dominic Green, *The Double life of Dr Lopez*, (London, 2003); Alford, *The Watchers*, pp. 298-309.

the subsequent trial processes.<sup>2</sup> Controlling how these plots were perceived by the wider public was another of the skills that Cecil learned during this period, most notably from his father. Burghley recognised the importance of spreading the right message about the queen and her privy council and the catholics. This chapter will also examine how this was done. The first plot to be assessed involved Richard Hesketh and first came to the attention of Cecil and the Elizabethan privy council in September 1593.

### Richard Hesketh's plot, September-November 1593

This section will use the plot involving the merchant and conspirator Richard Hesketh as a case study to define the role that Cecil played in the uncovering, interrogation and the punishments of those involved within the plot. Cecil's involvement during this plot highlights that, although it is commonly assumed that during Cecil's early career he was constantly under the supervision of his father, in this case he was given a certain degree of autonomy from Burghley. Additionally, this plot shows that Cecil worked alongside and over other courtiers and subordinates during this time, demonstrating that even though the late Elizabethan court is often portrayed as factional and fractious, there were times when courtiers and privy councillors came together, albeit for a limited period, to pursue common goals and objectives that affected the security of the realm and the queen herself.

Richard Hesketh was the fourth son of Gabriel Hesketh, a landowner of Aughton Hall, Lancashire, and his wife Jane, daughter of Sir Henry Halsall of Halsall. His oldest brother, Bartholomew, inherited his father's estates on his death, and as a Roman Catholic was questioned by the privy council in 1581 for sheltering the Jesuit Edmund Campion. The second eldest, Thomas Hesketh, was a duchy of Lancaster attorney and escheator at Lancaster. He gained a reputation at Westminster for vigorously enforcing the Elizabethan religious settlement in Lancashire. The Heskeths were also frequent visitors to Henry Stanley, fourth

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<sup>2</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, chapter 9.

Earl of Derby.<sup>3</sup> The Stanleys had long played a prominent role in the government of the north-west of England. Henry Stanley's son, Ferdinando, was descended from Henry VII through his mother Margret Clifford, daughter of Eleanor Brandon, a granddaughter of Henry VII, and thus had a claim on the English throne, especially after the execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587.<sup>4</sup> Thus they were one of a number of powerful northern families that the Elizabethan authorities watched closely. In sum, the Heskeths were known to the Elizabethan authorities as both known Catholics but also as trusted government officials in the county of Lancashire, and they had connections to the Stanleys.

Richard Hesketh was forced to flee England in October 1589 due to his involvement in an affray in which two men were killed. He travelled to Prague where he came under the patronage of Edward Kelly, the alchemist at the court of Rudolph II, but when Kelly fell from favour and was imprisoned, Hesketh was offered the protection of Thomas Stephenson, then a resident in the Jesuit College in Prague. By 1592, Hesketh was on the payroll of the regiment under Sir William Stanley, in Flanders, listed among his staff officers, where he was involved in the intelligence side of the regiment's work. Both Stanley and Cardinal William Allen were looking to promote the claims of the Stanleys to the English throne in order to disrupt the succession and to use the Earl as a figurehead to rally the support of disaffected Catholic nobles, who would then be assisted by Spanish funds and military reinforcements. In order to do so, they needed someone who both knew the Stanleys, had connections in Lancashire, and was experienced in espionage. Thus they chose Richard Hesketh to deliver a message to the Stanleys that they would have Spanish and Papal backing if they wanted to stake a claim to the English throne.<sup>5</sup> Hesketh entered England via Hamburg on 9 September 1593. Hesketh described in his interrogation how, on the morning of 16 September, as he was leaving the White Lion inn at Islington 'a boy of the house named John Waterworth ... did deliver me a

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<sup>3</sup> Hesketh, Richard (1553-1593), Merchant and Conspirator, *ODNB*.

<sup>4</sup> Ian Wilson, *Shakespeare: the evidence* (London, 1993) pp. 106-8.

<sup>5</sup> A. G. Petti, (ed.), 'The letters and despatches of Richard Verstegan, c. 1550-1640', *Catholic Record Society*, 52 (1959) pp. 200-201; Edwards, *Plots and Plotters*, pp. 170-73.

letter endorsed and directed to my late Lord Derby,[Henry Stanley, fourth Earl of Derby, who died on 25 September] which [he] told me was from Mr Hickman, my Lord's man, which letter ... were delivered to this Lord [Ferdinando Stanley] at my request'..<sup>6</sup>

Unbeknown to Hesketh, Hickman was working as a government agent. In his examination Hesketh mentions 'Mr Hickman' as 'my lord's man', which may mean Hickman was Lord Burghley's man or that he was Derby's man.<sup>7</sup> On Thursday 27 September Hesketh went to Lathom Park, the country estate of the Stanleys, handed over Hickman's letter and showed his passport to the new Earl, Ferdinando Stanley. Once Ferdinando had read the contents of the letter, he set out to London for an audience with the queen, whilst Hesketh was kept under restraint at Sutton Park near Windsor by Sir Edward Stanley. Francis Edwards asserts that the Hickman letter probably contained some reference to the succession question and Ferdinando's role within it, hence his eagerness to have a personal audience with the queen, and her subsequent authorisation for both Cecil and the privy council clerk William Waad to take Hesketh in for questioning.<sup>8</sup>

Hesketh's formal confession was taken by Waad on 4 and 5 November. Hesketh claimed that he was not acting under the direction of Cardinal Allen and neither was he his secretary, in fact he went so far as to say that he 'was never reconciled' to the church of Rome and that he had 'no credit with the recusants'. Hesketh stated repeatedly that he was a loyal servant of the English state. Nevertheless, he had been working for a close ally of Allen's so his plea of ignorance cannot be taken at face value. The confession is quite ambiguous as to what Hesketh actually confessed to although he does admit to carrying the message to Ferdinando Stanley as he was instructed, he confessed that he did ' [deliver] my message according as I had it in charge with all affection towards my L. and had obeyed his commandments blinded as many men are with their affections towards nobleman whom they think well of ... I would

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<sup>6</sup> Edwards, *Plots and Plotters*, p.177; Richard Hesketh statement, endorsed by Waad, 7 Nov 1594, *HMCS*, 1590-1594, vol. 4, p. 409.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Hesketh statement, endorsed by Waad, 7 Nov 1594, *HMCS*, 1590-1594, vol. 4, p. 409.

<sup>8</sup> Edwards, *Plots and Plotters*, pp. 180-81; Christopher Devlin, *Hamlet's divinity and other essays, with an introduction by C.V. Wedgwood* (London, 1963) p. 92.

rather have lain in prison during my life or suffered death then I would have done this message for any stranger's behoof'.<sup>9</sup>

In a sense this is what Hesketh would have been expected to say to try and save himself. But by carrying the letter from the Jesuits to Derby, Hesketh must have had some inkling that the contents may have been treasonous and that he played his part in trying to incite Derby into rebellion, but wisely chose not to admit it.

Richard Hesketh was then tried and convicted of treason and executed at St Albans on 29 November 1593, for being 'well acquainted with the said L. Strange, to come into England, & to insinuat himselfe into credit with the said L. Strange, and to shew him the opinion of the Cardinall and many others, how he shuld take vpon him the Title of King, with assurance of Treasure and forreine forces to maintaine the same, which the said Hesketh did very diligently performe'.<sup>10</sup> In his last statement, he 'bitterly with tears in his eyes bewailed his acquaintance, naming Sir William Stanley and others, cursed the time he had ever known them'.<sup>11</sup>

Five months after Hesketh's execution, on 16 April 1594 an apparently reasonably healthy Ferdinando Stanley, fifth Earl of Derby, unexpectedly died. In the days before his death he claimed that he had been bewitched, while others believed that he had been poisoned as revenge for his part in the Hesketh execution. Historians can only speculate as to the true cause of his death but it was not uncommon for reasonably healthy young men to die suddenly of an ailment which today would have been easily cured. What can be said with certainty is that after Ferdinando Stanley's death a bitter inheritance struggle ensued that curtailed the family's dominance and power in the region.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Examination of Richard Hesketh by William Waad, 5 November 1593, *HMCS*, Addenda, vol. 13, pp. 493-94.

<sup>10</sup> *A true report of sundrie Conspiracies of the late time detected to haue (by Barbarous murders) taken away the life of the Queenes most excellent Maestie, whom Almighty God hath miraculously conserued against the treacheries of her Rebelles, and the violences of her most puissant Enemies*, printed by Charles Yetsweirt Esquire (London, November 1594), pp. 18-19.

<sup>11</sup> Edwards, *Plots and Plotters*, pp.182-3; Devlin, *Hamlet's divinity*, p. 96.

<sup>12</sup> [The Earl of Sailsbury] to the conyeyor of the Court of Wards, [1606], *HMCS*, 1606, vol. 18, p. 440; The Countess of Derby to Cecil, November 1593, *HMCS*, 1590-1594, vol. 4, p. 427; Claims of Alice, Dowager Countess of Derby against William Stanley, Earl of Derby, *CSPD*, 1595-1597, vol. 253, p. 72.

With the basic outline of the Hesketh plot now set out, this chapter will now turn to analysing Robert Cecil's involvement in it. First of all, how did Cecil and his father initially find out about the plot? The first inkling that either Cecil or Burghley knew of a plot involving Ferdinando Stanley comes from a letter in May 1591. As we have seen in chapter 2, from July 1591, the priests John Cecil and John Fixer were acting as informants to the government. They passed on to Burghley a letter from Robert Parsons which contained coded references that Parsons, the superior of the English mission, intended to support the Stanley claim to the English throne, if the Stanleys themselves were prepared to take it.<sup>13</sup>

As we have seen, Snowden and Fixer were interrogated at Theobalds in May 1591. At that time, Snowden had told Burghley that he had been ordered to discuss the succession with Ferdinando Stanley and to get him to push his own claim to the throne with catholic support..<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Fixer had also confirmed that sounding out Lord Strange was part of their mission. His instructions from Sir Francis Englefield, Sir William Stanley, and Parsons were to sound out if Ferdinando Stanley would be open to pursue his claim, and if he was, to promise him the backing of Spain. Fixer and Cecil were also to find out if the catholic nobles would support Stanley's claim if he were to raise go against the Queen.<sup>15</sup>

This confession had profound consequences for Hesketh's attempt to incite a similar rising along these lines a few years later and would explain how he was allowed entry into England so easily. The Cecils knew that the leaders of the Jesuit mission, Allen and Robert Parsons, along with the English renegades, Englefield and Stanley, all planned to sound out the possibility of deposing Elizabeth through an invasion by sea and replacing her with Ferdinando Stanley, who the catholic nobility could rally around and raise forces to support their invasion. These statements can also suggest that Hesketh's attempt may have at least have had the consent of one or a few of these men, but by having been forewarned in 1591, the Cecils had

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Parsons to John Cecil and John Fixer, 13 April 1591, *HMCS*, 1591-1594, vol. 240, pp. 104-105.

<sup>14</sup> John Snowden [to Burghley], 21 May 1591, SP 12/238 f.244r-v.

<sup>15</sup> John Fixer [to Cecil?] 21 May 1591, *CSPD*, 1591-1594, vol. 238, pp. 40-41; SP 12/238 f.246-247 r-v.

kept a close eye on those coming in from the continent looking for an audience with Ferdinando Stanley, or the Stanley family, and adds credence to the view that the Hickman letter was used by the government to entrap Hesketh and incriminate the Stanleys by association. Thus it looks increasingly likely that the Hesketh mission was doomed to failure from the start.

Furthermore, Cecil had already had warning that the English Catholic exiles had designs on the Stanleys. In July 1593, a few months before Richard Hesketh landed in England, Cecil received a letter from William Goldsmith, a spy in the seminary in Rome, who reported a conversation with the priest Phillip Woodward, an attendant on Cardinal Allen whilst he was staying in Rome, asking 'if the Lord Strange were much at Court and in what grace with the queen'; having answered no, Goldsmith was left with the sense that 'Lord Strange though of no religion, should find friends to decide a nearer estate than all these titles [that the Cecils and other leading minsters now hold]'.<sup>16</sup> Whether Stanley himself had knowledge of it is unclear. What the Cecils did not know were the details: how would the plotters get a message to Ferdinando? Who would the messenger be? And most importantly how would the Stanleys react if they were offered the chance and resources to take the crown from Elizabeth?

The main interrogator in the Hesketh plot was William Waad, a trained lawyer and an intelligencer used by both the queen and the Cecil's on various diplomatic missions abroad. Waad made himself indispensable to both Burghley but also to Robert Cecil, so much so that almost straight after the accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne he was knighted on 20 May 1603. Often called the English counterpart to the Spanish grand inquisitor, he was a protestant who was committed to defending England from its catholic enemies. There was hardly a major conspiracy after 1585 in which he was not involved, and he often used torture to examine men suspected of treasonable intent.<sup>17</sup> It is not surprising therefore that Hesketh went on the defensive during their first interview on 4 November. Hesketh told Waad

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<sup>16</sup> William Goldsmith to Cecil, 11 July 1593, CP 169/102.

<sup>17</sup> Richard C. Barnett, *Place Profit and Power: A study of the servants of William Cecil*, (North Carolina, 1569), pp. 142-143.



that 'afore my going out of England, I had no credit among recusants, and since my coming into England, I have not spoken with any ...'<sup>18</sup> At his, second interview on 5 November, when confronted by the evidence that Waad had gleaned from both his brother Bartholomew Hesketh and Richard Baylye, a witness to Richard Hesketh's movements, he was forced to virtually plead for his life and assure Waad that 'I would rather have lain in prison during my life or suffered death then I would have done this message for any stranger's behoof'.<sup>19</sup> By the third interview conducted by Waad on 7 November, he was able to obtain from Richard Hesketh a confession that he did indeed pass over the letter he had received from Mr Hickman to Ferdinando Stanley along with his passport, although Hesketh remained adamant that the letter only contained news of those who had died in the recent plague in London. This evidence may lead us to conclude that Hesketh was just an innocent messenger and had no real contact with either Sir William Stanley or the Jesuits, a view taken by Edwards. However, he must almost certainly have had some inkling of why he was being sent to the Earl of Derby and he must have known the family's link to the English throne, due to his family's connections with the Stanleys. Therefore, even though his role may have been relatively minor, Hesketh surely did not cross the channel naively or without any hint of what the objective of his mission was.<sup>20</sup>

The evidence for Robert Cecil's involvement within the interrogation process and the subsequent trial comes primarily from two letters to Cecil from Sir John Puckering, the Lord Keeper and the second from William Waad. The Puckering letter, dated c. 24 November 1593, was written in the middle of the interrogation process and confirms to Cecil that the queen was happy with the evidence gathered so far to bring Hesketh to trial, while also acknowledging the role that Ferdinando Stanley played in apprehending Hesketh. Sir John also requested that since Cecil had received correspondence from the new Earl of Derby, he could assist the Attorney General in obtaining written evidence from Ferdinando himself to help in the

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Hesketh to William Waad, 4 November 1593, CP 170/64.

<sup>19</sup> Examination of Bartholomew Hesketh by William Waad, 4 November 1593; Examination of Richard Baylye by W. Waad, 5 November 1593, CP 170/67; Examination of Hesketh to Waad, 5 November 1593; *HMCS*, Addenda, vol. 13, pp. 493-4.

<sup>20</sup> Examination of Hesketh by Waad, 7 November 1593, CP 170/70.

conviction of Hesketh.<sup>21</sup> This letter also gives an indication of the queen's involvement during the trial process, showing that she was not a passive figure but also closely interested in the outcome of the trial.

In the second letter, dated 28 November 1593, the day before Hesketh's execution at St Albans, Waad reports to Cecil how the trial was conducted and what was said. He reports that:

The man [Hesketh] did confess the indictment and acknowledge all his former confessions and declarations to be true, so that there needed no other testimony against him. Nevertheless, Mr. Attorney General [Sir Thomas Egerton] laid open all the plot and course of his treasons for satisfaction of the standers by, in very discreet sort, and did make collections out of his confessions.<sup>22</sup>

Waad also adds that 'My Lord Chief Justice [Sir John Popham] before the pronouncing of the judgement, did use a very grave speech to the comfort of Her Majesty's good subjects, by these and the like graces God had shewed'.<sup>23</sup> This letter indicates that not only was Cecil interested in getting a guilty verdict (that was already guaranteed) but that the appropriate messages of loyalty to the crown, rightful punishments of traitors and the deliverance of the queen from her enemies, due to her adherence to the protestant faith and the upholding of the commonweal, were laid out to the public. The trials of traitors were a chance for the Tudor state to spread propaganda: to show that traitors to the state would receive punishment and to stress the disloyalty of catholics.

These two letters demonstrate that Cecil had the direct blessing of the queen herself to prosecute Hesketh but also that it was considered necessary to report the outcome to him.

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<sup>21</sup> The Lord Keeper [Sir John Puckering] to Cecil 24 November 1593, *HMCS*, 1590-1594, vol. 4, pp. 411-12.

<sup>22</sup> Waad to Cecil, 28 November 1593, CP 170/14.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, CP 170/14.

Therefore at an early stage of his career as a privy councillor, Cecil was trusted enough to be involved and to have some influence over the trial of a convicted traitor.

Whilst Waad was interrogating Richard Hesketh, Cecil was having more direct correspondence with Ferdinando Stanley. Shortly after his audience with the queen, on 13 October 1593, Ferdinando was anxious to express his views 'that the lewd fellow [Richard Hesketh] hath shown himself as base in mind as he is in bad manners', and he then pointedly wished 'that such vile men may never have more strength to stand against the truth, and will pray that all men may ever carry like faith as myself, to her whom I prize above myself ... It is my exceeding comfort if I have done anything that may content her [the queen]'.<sup>24</sup> What is notable about this letter is that Ferdinando Stanley felt that Cecil has sufficient influence both with the queen and at court that he should write to him to profess his loyalty. Another reason why Ferdinando was keen to gain the goodwill of Cecil was that he wanted the restoration of important offices to his family, notably that of Chamberlain of Chester, which would have given him control over the writs and processes of justice within the courts of the county. This was a politically influential and financially profitable appointment, a boost to the Stanleys' beleaguered reputation, which was made even worse due to its connections to the Hesketh plot, which Ferdinando was determined to refute.<sup>25</sup>

Ferdinando Stanley then wrote to Cecil a few months later on 9 November from one of his country estates, Newpark in Lancashire, indicating that he wanted to further distance himself from the Hesketh affair once he had performed his duty in informing Elizabeth of Hesketh's treason. The new Earl of Derby was complaining that Thomas Hesketh (Richard Hesketh's brother and the Duchy of Lancaster attorney) was disrupting Derby from collecting the subsidy for Lancashire, claiming that Thomas Hesketh would 'only cross me and win some credit' and that Derby was 'loth to be thwarted by so mean a man'..<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ferdinando Stanley, Earl of Derby to Cecil, 13 Oct [1593], CP 199/27

<sup>25</sup> Edwards, *Plots and Plotters*, pp. 184-5.

<sup>26</sup> Earl of Derby [Ferdinando Stanley] to Cecil, 9 Nov 1593, *HMCS*, 1590-1594, vol. 4, pp. 411-12.

The reason for this subversion of his authority, Derby explained is because 'I think he is angry that I used myself so honestly touching his brother [Richard Hesketh]'.<sup>27</sup> It would seem only natural that Thomas would take issue with the man who caused his brother to be imprisoned. Evidently Derby wanted Cecil to reprimand him for calling into question his authority at a time when Derby was keen to show himself a willing and able governor of Lancashire.

Ferdinando Stanley was not the only member of the family to try and preserve the family reputation. His wife Alice Spencer, Countess of Derby, wrote to Cecil, who was her cousin, expressing her hope that her husband's honourable reputation and loyalty would uphold his standing at court and with the queen despite the Hesketh treason. She also hinted that as friends and relatives of the Cecils she and the Earl could rely on their support.<sup>28</sup> However, no furtherance came and Ferdinando died on 14 April leaving the Chamberlainship of Chester to go to Sir Thomas Egerton, a former dependent of the Stanleys. Egerton had endeared himself into the Cecil's patronage and was rewarded as a result. To make matters worse, Ferdinando's will, stipulating that his estates, namely Lathom and Knowsley, should not be 'divided and dismembered into many parts and partitions', but left to his wife and then to pass to their eldest daughter Anne, was ignored and the estates passed to his brother William, who was married to Lady Elizabeth de Vere whose family had strong connections to the Cecils. Furthermore, Alice herself eventually married Sir Thomas Egerton, the man who had taken the Chamberlainship of Chester ahead of her late husband.<sup>29</sup>

The implications of the Hesketh plot were such that the privy council felt it necessary to issue a royal proclamation on 21 February 1594, a few months after Hesketh's execution. The proclamation tightened access to 'suspicious persons coming into England [from] beyond the sea'.<sup>30</sup> There were to be special officers whose role it was to question anyone who was not a merchant or a merchant's agent or having a warrant from the queen's officers beyond the seas.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, *HMCS*, 1590-1594, vol. 4, pp. 411-12.

<sup>28</sup> Countess of Derby to Cecil, November 1593?, *HMCS*, 1590-1594, vol. 4, pp. 427-8.

<sup>29</sup> Edwards, *Plots and Plotters*, pp. 190-93; Wilson, *Shakespeare: the evidence*, p. 176.

<sup>30</sup> P.L. Hughes and J.F. Larkin (eds.) *Tudor Royal Proclamations, 1588-1603*, vol. 3 (Yale, 1969) pp. 134-136.

The proclamations highlighted Dover, Sandwich, Rye, Gravesend, Yarmouth and London as likely places for these people to land and ordered that the names and descriptions of accused traitors were to be sent to these cities and towns. Perhaps in a reference to how easily Hesketh entered the country, there was now to be a ban on anyone who had served under William Stanley from entering the country, as Hesketh had briefly served in Stanley's regiment before coming to England. If anyone matching these criteria were to be found, he was to be 'attached, imprisoned and punished as an enemy'. The proclamation also offered a reward to any citizen who assists the state.<sup>31</sup>

This proclamation can be seen in two ways. In one sense it might show how vulnerable Lord Burghley (who drafted the proclamation) felt after the uncovering of the Hesketh Plot; as we will see, further plots were under investigation during February 1594 and Burghley and Cecil realised how easy it could be for catholic instigators to enter the country. But it can also be seen as a means by which to exaggerate the threat that these catholic plots presented, both for public consumption and also to keep the queen alert to potential danger, even in this period of relative calm.

The Hesketh plot was one of the first opportunities that Sir Robert Cecil had in identifying and discovering a plot against the queen, even if Hesketh was at best a mere messenger. The fact that back in 1591 the Cecils had known about the link between the Jesuit leaders and the Stanleys meant that they were prepared to use any attempt by dangerous individuals to contact the Stanleys to their own advantage. The Hesketh plot shows clearly that Cecil, through William Waad, was prepared to thoroughly question, and possibly use torture, to get incriminating evidence of a catholic plot within England. The queen also became involved with the plot once it was brought to her attention after her audience with Ferdinando Stanley, and Cecil took his instructions from her. Cecil also had an influence on making sure that the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, vol. 3, pp. 135-36.

sentencing of Hesketh was carried out to reflect well on the privy council's stance on traitors by instructing Waad to report back on the proceedings.

Was Hesketh really a traitor? It is hard to tell conclusively as even though he only carried the message he must have had some sense of what the letter said and what his mission entailed. Undoubtedly, the Cecils and the Elizabethan government exaggerated his actual role to remind the wider public and the queen that a threat from 'beyond the seas' did still exist and that security needed to be more rigorously enforced.

#### The 'Four Irishmen' Plot December 1593-February 1594

This section will seek to understand the events that led up to the plot involving William Polwhele, John Annias, Patrick Cullen/Collen and Hugh Cahill, which came to a head in February 1594. Three of them – Polwhele, Cullen and Cahill, all Irishmen – again came from the regiment of Stanley. Annias was an Irish adventurer whose allegiance is uncertain. These four men all knew each other either as acquaintances or had at least crossed paths. What seems certain however is that none of them had any intention of carrying out the objective of their mission, which was to assassinate either Elizabeth I or Don Antonio, the claimant to the Portuguese throne.<sup>32</sup>

The first of the men to come under interrogation was William Polwhele. Unfortunately, there is no indication of how he was taken into custody, but it was likely at one of the Cinque Ports such as Dover. There is a letter written by Richard Young, the London JP and well-known catholic-hunter, to Burghley on 3 December 1593, around the same time Polwhele was arrested, stating that he had examined some captured Irishmen as to their birthplaces and where they served, and had found that they were willing to defect and to tell their fellow countrymen to do the same. Young suggested that it was only the threat of being hung, drawn

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<sup>32</sup> Edwards, *Plots and Plotters*, chapter 8; Richard Young to Burghley, 3 December 1593, SP 12/246 f.37r; Confession of William Polwhele December 1593; SP 12/246 ff. 96-97r-v.

and quartered that had kept them serving with the enemy.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the Elizabethan authorities were on the lookout for Irishmen who had travelled from abroad.

In his confession in December 1593, Polwhele related how he first came to London with an Arthur Canfand, a priest, and then went to Flushing, then Calais, and then to Rheims. He then spent half a year in Douai, a major English catholic seminary, where a Dr Webb put Polwhele in touch with Sir William Stanley, whom he served as his page for six months. Having been in Stanley's regiment he was acquainted with his Lieutenant Jacopo Francisco (also known as Captain Jaques) who 'wished him to come to England to kill the Queen, saying that no action could be more glorious than cutting off such a wicked member, who is likely to overthrow all Christendom'.<sup>34</sup> Jaques and Father Sherwood, a Jesuit, both gave him details of how the commission could be carried out, insisting that it could only be done when the queen went for a walk or a sermon; she could then be stabbed or shot and he would have two or three hours to escape. However, to get him into the English court Polwhele was first told to 'go to Calais and abide with the spies, then apply to his [Jaques's?] friends at Court Mr Fortescue and Mr Sterrell'.<sup>35</sup> Mr Fortescue could mean Sir John Fortescue who was the Chancellor of the Exchequer at this time. Fortescue came from a conforming but staunchly catholic family and he himself sent his sons to the catholic-leaning Gloucester Hall, Oxford. One of these sons, Francis, became openly catholic and hid a Jesuit at his own house before going into exile.<sup>36</sup>

William Sterrell, alias Robinson, however, was a different matter. As a spy at court under the employ of Thomas Phelippes from 1591, Sterrell could have been the reason why Polwhele was picked up soon after coming into England, as part of his function was to warn the Elizabethan government of suspect characters trying to gain illegal entry into the country.<sup>37</sup>

The historian Patrick H. Martin describes Sterrell as having the education, the language and

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<sup>33</sup> Confession of William Polwhele, Dec 1593, SP 12/246 f.97r.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., SP 12/246 ff. 96r.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., SP 12/246 f.96r-v.

<sup>36</sup> Neil Younger, 'How Protestant was the Elizabethan Regime?', *EHR*, vol. 134, no. 564 (October, 2018) pp. 1060-92, esp. 1070-71.

<sup>37</sup> Edwards, *Plots and Plotters*, p. 398.

the rhetorical skills to make it as an intelligencer. He also had no wife or property to tie him down and, in 1585, whilst working as the agent and secretary for Edward Somerset, Earl of Worcester, wrote intelligence letters to catholic fugitives and foreign agents. He also had been targeted as religiously suspect during his time at Magdalen College, Oxford. Sterrell was also involving in assisting catholic youths to go abroad and join William Allen's seminaries. Martin gives us a picture of a young man who was a passionate if secretive catholic who wanted to further the cause of the Jesuits under the patronage of the Earl of Worcester, a known catholic nobleman.<sup>38</sup>

Stephen Alford gives us a slightly different interpretation about Sterrell based on his activities whilst working for Phelippes and Essex between 1591-93. Here we see a spy who could not come up with any useful intelligence to satisfy his demanding patron, and throughout this period Sterrell had to constantly canvass Phelippes for more money.<sup>39</sup> It is hard to judge what side Sterrell was really on. He may have been, in his youth, fired up by his experiences at University and helping to assist catholic fugitives flee abroad. But by 1591, he saw an opportunity to put his contacts and skills to good use and to get paid for it.<sup>40</sup> We can conclude from the evidence of his life that Sterrell probably played both sides but it seems that he had a more active intelligence working for the English government than any other so we may regard this as his closest affiliation; if only for financial reasons he may have always been regarded with suspicion due to his close ties with catholics.

The next man to be interrogated was John Annias in January 1594, before Sir Thomas Wilkes, Attorney General Thomas Egerton, Solicitor General Edward Coke, William Waad and Richard Young, demonstrating how seriously the privy council took the Irishmen's narratives. Annias related how he had left England in 1586 for Brittany and France and had acquired a commission from the Duke of Parma in the light horse, but he swore that he had never served William Stanley or Jaques, and that he knew Patrick Cullen but not Polwhele. Annias's main

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<sup>38</sup> Martin, *Elizabethan Espionage*, pp. 103-08.

<sup>39</sup> Alford, *The Watchers*, pp. 286-96.

<sup>40</sup> Martin, *Elizabethan Espionage*, p. 340.



contact seems to have been with a Mr Tompson who practised in 'fireworks'. Annias stated that he and Tompson were sent into England to perform special services and that they had it in mind to set the queen's navy on fire.<sup>41</sup> On 5 February, Cecil and Charles Howard commented and wrote out fifteen questions that they wanted Annias to answer.<sup>42</sup> Importantly from Cecil's perspective he was interested to know if there had been any connection between John Annias and Emanuel Louis Tinoco. Tinoco would become an important figure in the Lopez plot which will be discussed in more detail below, but it is important to note here that, whilst the examinations of the four Irishmen were underway, Cecil's focus was on the preliminary investigation into Dr Lopez and his Portuguese associates.<sup>43</sup>

The third person to come under interrogation was Patrick Cullen or Collen. In his examination on 6 February 1594, he stated that he had spent three years employed in Stanley's regiment fighting in the Low Countries and during this time he had become close to Jaques, but that afterwards they had fallen out. In October 1593, Cullen saw Jaques again at Brussels where Jaques tried to coerce him into undertaking a mission to kill Antonio Perez with a pistol. At the same time, Captain Oliver Eustace (probably a member of Stanley's regiment) advised Cullen that he should beware of undertaking any commission that Jaques asked him to do as he 'was a cunning fellow, and sought to set himself up with the fall of others; and if it were any enterprise against England or Ireland to refuse it being known to Florence McCarty and to the Earl of Kildare, to whom it would be a dishonour if an Irishman should do anything against his country'.<sup>44</sup> However, Cullen not only agreed but swore an oath to do it, whereupon Jaques gave him £30 in gold for his voyage. Cullen departed from Brussels to St Omer where he met an Irish priest to whom he confessed what he had promised to carry out.

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<sup>41</sup> Confessions of John Annias, January 1594, SP 12/247 ff.51-52r-v; Interrogatories for the examination of John Annias, [5 February] 1594, SP 12/247 f. 65r-v.

<sup>42</sup> Interrogatories for the examination of John Annias, [5 Feb] 1594, SP 12/247 ff.65-66r-v.

<sup>43</sup> Emanuel Louis [Tinoco] to Cecil, 16 January 1594, SP 12/247 ff. 22-23r-v; Dr Guy Lopez to Cecil 26 February 1594, *CSPD*, 1591-1594, vol. 247, p. 443; Cecil to Windebank, 28 February 1594, SP 12/247 f.158r.

<sup>44</sup> Examination of Patrick Collen before Sir Thomas Wilkes, Attorney General Thomas Egerton, Solicitor General Edward Coke and Richard Young, 6 February 1594, SP 12/247 f.72r-v.

Polwhele, Cullen and Annias in their various examinations all admitted to knowing each other. In the first of his subsequent six interrogations Annias admitted knowing Patrick Cullen but not William Polwhele. Polwhele, however, alleged that he had met Annias and Thompson whilst at Lillie on his way to England and that Annias, Polwhele claimed, 'intended to deceive him, and stay him there by fair speeches, until he could send Thompson to England first, to have killed the Spaniard [possibly Lopez]. Failing to do that ... when they came to Gravelines, to make him drunk and cut his purse ["To get his money, that he should not pass"], and failing in this, to take his money by force'.<sup>45</sup> In his various interrogations Annias implicated both Polwhele and Cullen in plots devised by Jaques and Father Holt to kill either the queen or Antonio Perez.<sup>46</sup> Importantly, Annias in his confession on 9 February 1594, implied that Jaques took Cullen to see the Spanish secretary of state for war, Esteban de Ibarra, where Cullen was supposed to have been given a pension and assurances about the importance of his mission. Cullen himself later admitted that he had received a pension from the King of Spain of 15 crowns a month, which was negotiated by Stanley and Jaques.<sup>47</sup> It was because of this admission by Cullen that he had received a pension from a foreign power, and coupled with the testaments of both Polwhele and Annias, that his mission was to kill the queen, that Cullen was the only one of the three to be executed.<sup>48</sup>

At around the same time as the other three Irishmen were under interrogation, in February 1594, Hugh Cahill came over to England looking to tell Burghley about a plot instigated by Jaques and various Jesuits to kill the queen. Instead of Burghley, who was away, Cahill had the misfortune of being interviewed by Richard Topcliffe at Burghley's house in London, where he related his background: he was born in Tipperary, Ireland, and served in the English forces

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<sup>45</sup> Confession of John Annias, January 1594, *CSPD*, 1591-94, vol. 247, p. 247; Questions suggested by Polwhele to be put to John Annias, [4 February] 1594, SP 12/247 ff.59-60r-v.

<sup>46</sup> Examination of John Annias, 5 Feb 1594, SP 12/247 ff.68-70r-v.

<sup>47</sup> Confession of John Annias before Solicitor General Coke, 9 February 1594, SP 12/247 f. 86r; Examination of Patrick Cullen before Sir Michael Blount and Justice Richard Young, 21 February 1594, SP 12/247 f. 123r; Edwards, *Plots and Plotters*, pp.199-200.

<sup>48</sup> For evidence of Cullen's execution, see [Hugh Owen to Phelippes] March? 1594, *CSPD*, 1591-94, pp. 475-77; Lord Burghley 1594 a report in to the treasons of Patrick Cullen and Richard Hesketh, anno 35 Eliza, *HMCS*, 1594-1595, vol. 5 pp. 58-59; Edwards, *Plots and Plotters*, p. 203.

sent over to the Low Countries. However he was 'taken prisoner by the freebooters of Zutphen, who served under Taxis and kept him prisoner 24 weeks after which Taxis put him in choice either to serve under him, on the enemy's side, as divers Irishman did, or be hanged; to save his life, promised to serve him and took oath to serve there, under the king of Spain'.<sup>49</sup> Cahill then states how John Daniell, an professional agent working for Lord Burghley, invited him to take on a mission being planned by Father Jason Archer, Stanley and Hugh Owen. With Daniell's help the plan was for Cahill to be smuggled into England and to use Daniell's court connections to co-opt a person serving in the Queen's privy chamber to gain access to her and then 'kill her with a swaord or a dagger, at a gate or narrow passage, as she walked in some of her galleries', once this was done they were to be rewarded with '100 crowns towards his charges and 2,000 more when he had killed her', and his pension would be enlarged from 15 crowns a month to 30.<sup>50</sup>

Having promised to perform the task he duly set out for England, although he never had any such intention of fulfilling his mission.<sup>51</sup> Evidently, Daniell's thoughts were the same as both men seem to have agreed to cross over to England with the intention of informing Burghley of the plot.

The exact instigator or mastermind of this plot can be hard to determine. Likely, it was a combination of the men mentioned by the Irishmen. Their main contact had been Jacopo, William Stanley's lieutenant, with the Jesuits Fathers William Holt and Walpole actively giving their blessing to their missions. As Stanley's lieutenant, Jacopo must have had the approval of his superior to organise these plots, but Stanley himself seems have remained in the background; either he was happy to let his lieutenant take the blame for any failure, or he thought that Jaques had more of a rapport with these mercenary Irishmen. It seems most likely that the idea of sending them separately into England was intended to increase the chances of success and meant if they were captured they would be less likely to betray each other.

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<sup>49</sup> Confession of Hugh Cahill to Richard Topcliffe, 21 February 1594, SP 12/247 ff. 126-27r-v.

<sup>50</sup> Declaration of John Daniell, 21 February 1594, *CSPD*, 1591-94, vol. 247, p. 438.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, SP 12/247 f.130r-v.

This evidently failed. Also in question was the actual target set out by Stanley, Jacopo, Holt and Walpole: did they want to kill the queen, or Antonio Perez, or both? Perhaps they wanted Cullen to kill Antonio Perez and have Hugh Cahill to kill the queen.

Another puzzling part of these plots was how the actual assassinations were to be carried out. For example, in William Polwhele's confession in December 1593, he outlined a seemingly naive way of assassination, saying that Jaques was adamant that the queen could only be killed by being shot or stabbed when she was walking or attending a sermon 'as she takes no care', which is certainly not true.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, in Cahill's confession on 21 February 1594, the plan was that once he had gained access to the English court he was to contrive some way of waylaying her as she walked along her galleries and stab her with a sword or dagger, but offering him no means of escape.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps the reason for these seemingly far-fetched and badly planned plots can be explained by the declining health of William Allen, who subsequently died in February 1594. There must have been other Jesuits such as Holt, Walpole and Archer who looked to take up Allen's mantle of using foreign catholic aid against the protestant Elizabethan regime. Furthermore, the way in which the plots seem so hastily put together may be because of the lack of any serious financial backing from Spain; even though the plots may have had spiritual support from members of the English Jesuits, they do not seem to have had financial support.

The officials tasked with interviewing and deciphering the key points of the plots were Sir Thomas Wilkes, Thomas Egerton, Edward Coke, William Waad, Justice Richard Young and Richard Topcliffe. Even though these men held important positions within the governmental and judicial hierarchy, they were not members of the privy council. The lack any direct involvement from men such as Cecil can be explained by the fact that the Lopez plot had come to light whilst the four Irishmen were being interrogated. This meant that any privy council

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<sup>52</sup> Confession of William Polwhele, December 1593, SP 12/247 f.96v.

<sup>53</sup> Cahill to Topcliffe, 21 February 1594, SP 12/247 ff.126-128r-v.

involvement was directed to this new plot as it was deemed to require the more urgent attention.

The implications of the plots of the four Irishmen and the Hesketh plot resulted in the tightening of security around the queen and access to her. As we have seen, this was implemented by a royal proclamation drafted by Burghley and issued by the privy council on 21 February 1594. This was right in the middle of the interrogation process of the four Irishmen, meaning that Burghley, Cecil and the rest of the privy council wanted to use the interrogations as a means to protect the queen and, at the same time, to make sure that the privy council had more control over access to her. In his draft, he specifically stated that 'No Irish suitor is to be suffered to have any suit preferred without a certificate from the lord deputy or some of the council'. There were to be further restrictions whereby anyone known to be Irish who lived about the court had to be present for interrogations as to their roles and purpose; failure to do so would result in imprisonment.<sup>54</sup>

There was also a specific clause stating that 'no one who has served in Sir William Stanley's band, or otherwise for the King of Spain, is to be allowed to come into the realm', and any who do so were liable to be imprisoned and punished as an enemy of the state, and there was a reward for anyone who helped apprehend them.<sup>55</sup> This must have seemed like a huge restriction and level of surveillance on any Irishman who happened to be in London at this time. Again, these can be seen as both sensible precautions against a viable threat, or more cynically as a ploy by the Cecils and the privy council to use the recent plots as a means of gaining more authority and control over the queen and the populace, under the guise of maintaining order and security within the realm.

Perhaps as a consequence of the proclamation, Hugh Owen, the Habsburg's intelligencer, wrote to Thomas Phelippes, then in the employ of the Earl of Essex, to defend himself and

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<sup>54</sup> Directions for the apprehension of suspicious persons coming into England from beyond the seas, 17 February 1594, SP 12/247 f. 98-99r-v.

<sup>55</sup> Directions for the apprehension of suspicious persons coming into England from beyond the seas, 17 February 1594, SP 12/247 f. 98v-99r.

Stanley against the allegations that Polwhele, Annias, Cullen and Cahill had put forward, insisting that they had sent them into England to assassinate the queen.<sup>56</sup> In the letter, Owen rejects the claim that he had meetings with any of them and points to the fact that Cullen ‘the poor man said as much, both at his arraignment and execution, but all would not help; such force had iniquity and injustice against simplicity and innocence’. He states the same for Stanley and he was sorry that the queen was deceived by her councillors, who he blamed for instigating these false plots.<sup>57</sup>

Owen then went on to discredit the intelligence that Daniell had passed over, insisting that there were no men in Stanley’s regiment ready and waiting to come into England. He also blamed Daniell for the tightening surveillance at the ports, the detaining of his fellow countrymen, getting Annias put in prison in the Tower and the execution of Patrick Cullen, all for his monetary ambitions..<sup>58</sup>

Of course, Owen would want to distance himself from the allegations, as he was working as a double agent by contacting Phelippes, who would have then passed on the information to the Earl of Essex. To try and distinguish whether these plots were genuine or just hearsay that they had picked up from different sources is hard to say with any certainty. It is plausible, since they all served at one time or another in the same regiment, that the four Irishmen knew or had acquaintance with Richard Hesketh, as Polwhele stated that he went to meet Father Sherwood ‘Soon after they sent Hesketh [Hesketh] into England’.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, there is strong evidence that Sir William Stanley and his Lieutenant Jaques, alongside the priests, were looking to try and cause disruption in England, either by assassination, as the four Irishmen claimed, or by assessing the possibility of a catholic uprising, as the Hesketh intrigue had shown. It is likely that because of the uncovering of these two plots there was an atmosphere

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<sup>56</sup> [Hugh Owen to Phelippes] Brussels? March? 1594, SP 12/248 ff.125-6r-v.

<sup>57</sup> [Hugh Owen to Phelippes] Brussels? March?, . SP12/248 f. 125v.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, SP12/248 f. 126r.

<sup>59</sup> Confession of William Polwhele, December 1593, SP 12/246 f.96r-v.

of suspicion and intrigue that allowed the accusations surrounding Dr Lopez to be given more credence than they merited, with tragic consequences.

#### The Lopez plot, January-April 1594

The plot surrounding the queen's personal physician, Dr Rodrigo Lopez is the most documented plot of the 1590s. It was certainly the most shocking event since the Spanish Armada in 1588. The accusations made by the Earl of Essex against Lopez were that he had tried to poison the queen with the promise of Spanish gold as his reward. This came as a shock to both queen and court, as Lopez had been in a position of great trust regarding Elizabeth's health and wellbeing, so for him to be accused of treason must have been a severe blow to her. Much has been written on the Lopez plot. Stephen Alford characterises the accusations as 'improbable in the extreme' and attributes the scandal to Essex's political ambition to impress Elizabeth and to show her that he and his associates, the Bacons, were capable of filling influential offices of state. Essex had seen both Cecil and those who supported him gain credit for their work in uncovering the previous plots and may have felt that he needed to make up ground in order to retain Elizabeth's favour. Alford also blames the 'febrile worries about espionage' as other causes why the plot was taken so seriously.<sup>60</sup> In all likelihood, given the recent uncovering of the Hesketh and the four Irishmen plots, it would have been easy for the accusations to stick to Lopez as Alford states, because members of the privy council were on the alert to such plots.

John Guy's account gives us a sense of why the queen might have thought Lopez was guilty, as he did have Portuguese connections that were involved in espionage activities. He also points out, like Alford, that it was Essex who first drove the investigation into Lopez's activities and that a personal slight by Lopez could have been the cause of this. But the overriding factor was that the destruction of Lopez was politically expedient both to the queen, Essex and the Cecils; he was not worth the political effort to save, guilty or not.<sup>61</sup> Francis Edwards clearly

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<sup>60</sup> Alford, *The Watchers*, pp. 300-05.

<sup>61</sup> Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, pp. 222-236.

states that Lopez was not guilty but, unlike Alford and Guy, his viewpoint was that the Cecils, and not Essex, were most to blame for driving through Lopez's guilty verdict, as they were in the strongest position politically to halt the investigation. Again it was the political machinations, rather than any real threat against the queen's life, which led to Lopez's execution for treason.<sup>62</sup>

After arriving in England in 1559, Lopez established himself by being appointed house physician at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London, receiving £2 a year. In 1563, he married Sarah Anes, the daughter of the queen's grocer, who was also of Portuguese Jewish descent. They both conformed by attending their local parish church, but reputedly continued to practise Judaism in secret. Lopez came to the attention of the Earl of Leicester, who appointed him his chief physician, and he also treated Francis Walsingham. In 1581 he was appointed as the queen's chief physician with a salary of £50 a year. It seems that Lopez always retained an interest in the affairs of his homeland and, after the arrival of the pretender to the Portuguese throne Dom Antonio in 1581, Lopez petitioned Leicester to get Antonio safe passage into England, acted as his agent and also treated him when he was ill.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, Lopez had affiliations with Dom Antonio and those who served him such as Manuel Andrada, a close agent working for Dom Antonio, who was based in London; Esteban Ferrera De Gama, advisor to King Philip, and also a double agent; and Emanuel Louis Tinoco, a spy based in Antwerp, who was friends with both Andrada and de Gama.<sup>64</sup>

After the failure of the English attack on Lisbon in 1589, conducted by Sir Francis Drake and Sir John Norris, the queen's support for Dom Antonio's restoration to the Portuguese throne began to wane. This led his Portuguese agents to considering switching their allegiance to Spain. This presented Burghley with an opportunity to recruit these Portuguese agents as spies inside Philip's court in hope of gaining useful intelligence, but it also ran the risk of these unofficial spies turning over information gleaned from Elizabeth's privy councillors and

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<sup>62</sup> Edwards, *Plots and Plotters*, pp. 205-235.

<sup>63</sup> Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, pp. 222-23.

<sup>64</sup> Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, pp. 228-9; Edwards, *Plots and Plotters*, pp. 208, 215.



courtiers to the Spanish.<sup>65</sup> During 1591, Burghley used Lopez's connections with the London Portuguese community to recruit Andrada to travel to Madrid and sound out Philip's intentions for England, be they war or peace. After being granted an interview, Philip and his advisors sounded Andrada out, to see if he would be interested in either killing or kidnapping Dom Antonio, for which they would reward him with a gold ring set with a diamond and a large ruby worth over £100. Andrada then passed on this jewel to Lopez as a gift for his daughter. This same jewel was used against Lopez as proof that he received payment from the Spanish court.<sup>66</sup> On his return journey to England, Andrada was arrested near Dieppe and Burghley sent his servant Thomas Mills and Lopez to interrogate Andrada, and afterwards Burghley himself met Andrada. Eventually, Andrada was released and lodged with Lopez, but he escaped and fled to Brussels.<sup>67</sup> This brief encounter would come back to haunt Burghley when Essex began discovering a plot surrounding Lopez and Andrada in late January 1594.

Essex had been keen to prove to Elizabeth that he was as serious about being an effective privy councillor as the Cecils and that he had the capabilities to uncover plots against her. Paul Hammer suggests that it was an encounter that Lopez had with the known Portuguese agent de Gama at Walton on 21-22 June 1593 which made Essex suspicious.<sup>68</sup> After investigating further with the help of Anthony Bacon, Essex was confident enough to openly accuse Lopez of a plot to assassinate the queen. However, she and the Cecils did not believe him. He wrote to his father 'In Lopez's folly, I see no point of treason intended to the Queen, but a readiness to make some gain to hurt of Dom Antonio'.<sup>69</sup> It was after this embarrassment that Essex redoubled his efforts to incriminate Lopez and on 23 January 1594, he interrogated Manuel Louis Tinoco, a Portuguese double-agent, who was carrying secret letters to be given to de Gama. In his statement Tinoco incriminated Lopez by saying that Andrada had offered

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<sup>65</sup> Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, p. 224

<sup>66</sup> Yetswiert, Charles, (ed.), *A True Report of Sundry Horrible Conspiracies of late time detected* (London, November 1594), p.8; Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, p. 225; Edwards, *Plots and Plotters*, p. 211; Alford, *The Watchers*, p. 305.

<sup>67</sup> Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, pp. 225-6; Edwards, *Plots and Plotters* pp. 212-213; CSPD, 1591-1594, vols. 239-240, pp. 69, 82-83, 88-102.

<sup>68</sup> Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, pp. 228-9; Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, pp. 159-60.

<sup>69</sup> Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, p. 229; Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, p. 161.

Lopez a jewel of great value (the same jewel that Essex later used against Lopez to get him convicted of treason) to do some service for the King of Spain and that de Gama was to ensure that Lopez carried out the assassination attempt.<sup>70</sup> Once Elizabeth was shown this letter she authorised Lopez, Andrada and de Gama to be transferred to the Tower. There, under increasing pressure from Essex's interrogations, de Gama and Andrada incriminated Lopez by stating that he planned to kill the queen by administering her with a poisoned syrup. Lopez denied the charges.<sup>71</sup>

Despite not being able to obtain a signed confession from Lopez, Essex was convinced that he had enough evidence against him to get a charge of treason. At this point, the Cecils surprisingly changed their stance from believing Lopez innocent to being guilty. The most likely explanation for this about face could be that Essex was getting close to potentially uncovering Burghley's dealings with Andrada in 1591 at a time when the Cecil's political position could not afford to be compromised.<sup>72</sup>

At Lopez's trial in the Guildhall on the 28 February he was found guilty of treason by a special commission of fifteen judges, including Sir John Spenser the lord mayor, Charles Howard the lord admiral, Lord Buckhurst, Cecil, Heneage, Sir John Popham the chief justice of the queen's bench and Essex; Lopez's fate was a foregone conclusion.<sup>73</sup> De Gama and Tinoco were tried separately on 14 March, when a guilty verdict was also reached. Three months later all three were condemned to hang to Tyburn with Lopez, according to William Camden, 'affirming that he loved the queen as well as he loved Jesus Christ, which coming from a man by the Jewish profession moved no small laughter in the standers-by'.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Statement by [Manuel Louis Tinoco], 23 January 1594, SP 12/247 f.30r; Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, p. 161; Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, p. 230.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, SP 12/247 f.30r; Confession of Stephen Ferrera de Gama before the Earl of Essex, 18 February 1594, SP 12/247 ff. 109-110r-v., Confession of Manuel Louis Tinoco, [23 February] 1594, SP 12/247 f.138r-v.

<sup>72</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, pp. 161-6; Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, p. 233; Edwards, *Plots and Plotters*, p. 221.

<sup>73</sup> Memorandum respecting Lopez's treason against her Majesty, 9 March 1594, CSPD, 1591-1594, vol. 248, p. 455-56; Edwards, *Plots and Plotters*, p. 227.

<sup>74</sup> William Camden, *The History of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princess Elizabeth, late Queen of England*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (London, 1688), pp. 484-85.

Was Lopez guilty? The short answer would be no. The overriding factor that points to his innocence must surely be the question of why would he jeopardise his position at court and that of his wife and daughter. He had been the queen's chief physician since 1581, so why would he have waited over ten years later to start conspiring against her, after he had worked so hard to build up his professional reputation since he had arrived in England seeking asylum back in 1559.

More importantly in the context of this thesis, what was Cecil's part in the Lopez plot? His first involvement was after the queen instructed him and his father to look into the accusations that Essex had brought before her on 7 January 1594.<sup>75</sup> At this point Cecil sent a note to Burghley making clear that neither of them believed that Lopez was guilty of trying to poison the queen. Then in early February, the Cecils changed their opinion and this sudden volte-face has been debated amongst historians. Most historians, including Alford, Guy and Hammer, put it down to the political tensions between the Cecils and Essex.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, by late January Essex was getting too close for comfort to exposing Burghley's involvement with Andrada in 1591, so it made sense for Cecil to get more actively involved in the investigations. It must also be considered that Burghley's health at this time was poor. He was suffering from severe attacks of gout which meant that he was unable to use his influence to stop Essex attacking Lopez, so it was up to Cecil to take up the workload, which he did: passers by reported that he 'goeth and cometh very often between London and the Court, so that he comes out with hands full of papers, and head full of matter and so occupied passeth thro' the presence like a blind man, not looking upon any'.<sup>77</sup>

Cecil's next major involvement was at the trial itself. Cecil was one of those appointed to the special commission to try Lopez, which was to all extent and purposes a show trial. Show trials like these were an excellent way for the queen and her senior councillors and officials to

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<sup>75</sup> Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, p.228; Alford, *The Watchers*, p. 304.

<sup>76</sup> Alford, *The Watchers*, pp. 300-301; Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, pp. 230-31; Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, pp. 160-163.

<sup>77</sup> Thomas Birch, *Memoirs of the reign of Queen Elizabeth from the year 1581 till her death*, vol. 1 (London 1754), p. 155.

demonstrate to the populace that they were doing their duty to protect the country by prosecuting traitors and those who would look to instigate civil strife. Sir Edward Coke, soon to be appointed attorney general, was the prosecutor. In his speech laying out the evidence against Lopez, he reminded the court that the plots committed over the past months stemmed from the King of Spain, emphasised the role that the Jesuits had played and then harangued Lopez as 'a perjured murdering traitor ... He was Her Majesty's sworn servant, graced and advanced with many princely favours, used in special places of credit, permitted often access to her person, and so not suspected, especially by her'. He highlighted the fact that because Lopez was in such a position of trust, his treasons were more damning than those of Hesketh and Cullen in the previous plots. The details of the plot were then read out to the court who predictably returned a guilty verdict.<sup>78</sup>

Thus the privy councillors were keen to express how serious and active the Spanish and the Jesuits were in attempting to undermine the queen and her government; whether or not Lopez actually had any intention of poisoning her was not the point. The Hesketh and Cullen treasons had had links to Sir William Stanley and the Jesuits, therefore in the minds of Burghley, Cecil and the other privy councillors the threats from abroad were real and justified. What the Lopez plot allowed the privy council to do was to attach all these concerns to a target who would capture the public imagination much more than an unknown merchant, such as Hesketh, or an Irishman, such as Richard Hesketh and Patrick Cullen.

After the guilty verdict, Cecil wrote to Thomas Windebank, clerk of the signet, wishing him to inform the queen that he had just returned from the Guildhall when

The vyllaine [Lopez] confessed all ye day ...when he saw both his intent and overt Fact were apparent, ye vile jew sayd yt he dyd confess indead to us yt he had talk of it, but now he must tell trew, he dyd belyed himself and dyd it only to save him self from Racking w[hi]ch ye L[ord] knoweth our sowles to be most untrew ... [The] most substantiall Jury yt I have seene

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<sup>78</sup> Abstract of the evidence laid before the jury on the trial of Lopez, [28 February] 1594, *CSPD*, 1591-1594, vol. 248, pp. 445-48.

have told hime guilty in the highest degree of all Treasons and the [judge]ment passed against hime w[i]th [the] applause of all ye world'..<sup>79</sup>

Cecil's next task was to secure evidence against de Gama and Tinoco and then to help arrange their trial. Whilst Waad interrogated Tinoco, Cecil put pressure on de Gama. Cecil's actions during this interview can be deduced from a letter from Benjamin Beard, possibly a servant of the Cecils, to Sir John Puckering, keeper of the great seal, on 10 March 1594. Cecil managed to obtain de Gama's confession by informing him that he had lost his and his father's favour, therefore the only way to save himself was to confess all he knew and look to the queen to grant him mercy.<sup>80</sup> Meanwhile, Waad, with the help of Essex, managed to implicate Tinoco, by confirming that he did carry letters from Count Fuentes, the commander in the Spanish Netherlands, to the Spanish Secretary for War, de Ibarra, discussing the details of Lopez's attempt on the queen.<sup>81</sup>

A trial date was set for the 14 March, which was presided over by serjeant-elect Mr. Daniel. The nomination of a serjeant rather than a judge is an indication as to how keen the privy council were in getting the trial over and done with so that de Gama, Tinoco and Lopez could all be executed together. This rush was because of fears that Lopez may try to take his own life before his execution, thus robbing them of an essential propaganda opportunity.<sup>82</sup> At the trial Tinoco and de Gama were both tried and convicted for sending secret messages and intelligence to the King of Spain and promising Lopez 50,000 crowns if he were to poison the queen. The commissioners condemned both men 'for the highest and most horrible treasons'; they were then returned to the Tower along with Lopez to await their executions.<sup>83</sup>

Over a month later, on the 25 April, Sir Michael Blount, the lieutenant of the Tower, wrote to Cecil and Sir Thomas Heneage regarding conflicting orders from Sir Edward Coke and the

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<sup>79</sup> Cecil to Windebank, 28 February 1594, SP 12/247 f.158r.

<sup>80</sup> Benjamin Beard to Lord Keeper Puckering, 10 March 1594, *CSPD*, 1591-1594, vol. 248, pp. 456-57.

<sup>81</sup> Waad to Cecil, 12 March 1594, SP 12/248 f.45r.

<sup>82</sup> Puckering to Cecil, [14 March] 1594. SP 12/248 f.51r-v.

<sup>83</sup> Egerton to Puckering, 14 March 1594, *CSPD*, 1591-1594, vol. 261, 460-61; Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, pp. 233-34; Edwards, *Plots and Plotters*, p. 230.

queen. 'I have received your Honour's letters of this 24th of April, wherein you declare Her Majesty's pleasure, that although I do receive any warrant to deliver Doctor Lopez to be executed, notwithstanding I shall not deliver him... but your Honour doth not command me to make stay of the other two Portuguese, Ferrara and Emanuel Louis. If it please your Honour that I may also understand Her Highness' pleasure for those other Portuguese, otherwise I know not what to do.'<sup>84</sup>

It appeared that the queen was reluctant to execute a person on whom she had relied upon for so many years. This could prove disastrous for the Cecil's attempts to gain the political and propaganda merits out of the trials, as Lord Buckhurst informed Cecil that unless the three Portuguese were executed soon, then the commissioners' authority would expire and so retrials would have to be organised and the prisoners released.<sup>85</sup> To get around the queen's continued refusal to sanction the executions, Cecil and Burghley needed to get the prisoners out of Blount's jurisdiction. To do this John Guy states that they used a legal trick. They applied on the 4 June to the judges of the court of queen's bench for a writ ordering Lopez, de Gama and Tinoco to be sent to Westminster to answer more questions. On the 7 June the prisoners arrived, the questions were asked and nothing new was discovered. The prisoners were then sent back to prison, but not to the Tower but to the Marshalsea, where the queen's restraining order was not in force. Consequently, the next day Lopez, de Gama and Tinoco were sent to Tyburn and there executed.<sup>86</sup>

The Lopez plot can be seen as an important stepping stone for Sir Robert Cecil's career, both politically and professionally. This analysis has shown that he played an more important role within the investigation and trial than has been previously thought. He was entrusted with interrogating important state prisoners, gathering evidence, organising and assisting in the appointment of judges in the trials of de Gama and Tinoco. Additionally, the appointment of

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<sup>84</sup> Blount to Heneage and Cecil, 25 April 1594, *HMCS*, 1590-1594, vol. 4, p. 515.

<sup>85</sup> Lord Buckhurst to Sir John Fortescue and Cecil, 18 April 1594, *HMCS*, 1590-1594, vol. 4, p. 513.

<sup>86</sup> Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, pp. 234-35.

Sir Edward Coke to the post of attorney general boosted the Cecils' influence in the law courts and in turn damaged Essex's influence.<sup>87</sup>

As already outlined above the Lopez plot must be seen within the context of the political manoeuvrings between the Cecils and Essex for political influence over important official appointments. Essex may have brought the evidence of Lopez's supposed treason to Elizabeth first, but the Cecils quickly took control of proceedings. It must also be seen alongside the other plots surrounding Richard Hesketh and the four Irishmen which occurred beforehand: there was already an atmosphere of suspicion and heightened tension at court. The accusation against Lopez tied in with the plots committed by the Jesuits and Sir William Stanley; if Essex had denounced Lopez at any other time then perhaps it would have been easier for the queen and the Cecils to dismiss Essex's claims.

#### The Yorke and Williams plot, June 1594-February 1595

The plot surrounding Captain Edmund Yorke and Richard Williams came to light on 23 June 1594, when Yorke wrote to the Earl of Essex, from Calais, asking for his assistance in obtaining passage to England to claim the inheritance that he thought he was due.<sup>88</sup> Captain Edmund Yorke was the son of Sir Edmund Yorke and nephew of Sir Rowland Yorke. Both had enjoyed significant if not distinguished military careers before changing sides to the Spanish, as Sir William Stanley had, with their regiment at Zutphen.<sup>89</sup> However, in May 1592, both Sir Edmund and Sir Rowland died in battle. This had left Edmund Yorke without family support and, tainted by his father and uncle's treachery, little hope of obtaining any inheritance from his father and Sir Rowland who had considerable property in Flanders.<sup>90</sup> This was what led Yorke to write to Essex.

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<sup>87</sup> Martin, *Elizabethan Espionage*, pp. 143, 147.

<sup>88</sup> Edmund Yorke to Earl of Essex, 23 June 1594, SP 12/249 f.31r.

<sup>89</sup> Edwards, *Plots and Plotters*, p. 236.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, p. 236-7.

In his letter, Yorke refers to two men who were looking to come over to England with him: Richard Williams and Henry Young. Richard Williams, according to Yorke's letter, had travelled with him to England. Presumably Williams had also served in Sir Edmund's regiment alongside his son. Henry Young had 'been in Stanley's regiment three years'.<sup>91</sup> Essex granted Yorke's request and all three travelled over from Calais to England. Having men come from a renegade English regiment, especially from Stanley's, would provide Essex with intelligence on England's enemies and the opportunity to uncover another plot to boost his prestige with the queen.

The first to be interrogated was Henry Young on 30 July 1594. He told his examiners that Sir William Stanley and Father William Holt had persuaded Yorke to take Richard Williams with him to England, who being a Welshman and having many catholic friends, would then raise a rebellion in North Wales. The rebellion's objective would be to take Conway Castle and would begin at Christmas. Money would be provided from William's uncle Ralph Sheldon and a Mr Pew, a rich Anglesea squire and merchant. Young 'heard this at a conference with [Dr William] Gifford and Holt at Dr Worthington's chamber'. Yorke had brought over his uncle's will with a copy of a decree in Italian and a letter from Friar Fenn, his uncle's executor. Additionally, in order to reinforce the illusion that both Yorke and Williams were discontented with Stanley, 'they sold their cloaks and were denied a passport by Stanley'; they were to be 'stayed at Artois', and there imprisoned so that 'news thereof might reach Calais'.<sup>92</sup> Francis Edwards insists that Henry Young's eagerness to offer up his examination, which resulted in both Yorke and Williams being arrested themselves, can only mean that Young must have been a government agent placed within Stanley's regiment.<sup>93</sup> However, Young could also have hoped to trade on this information in hope of some financial reward or a pardon from the privy council. Both of these could be possible, as this had happened with John Annias implicating William

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<sup>91</sup> Yorke to Essex, 23 June 1594, SP 12/249 f.31r.

<sup>92</sup> Confession of Henry Young, 30 July 1594, CSPD, 1591-94, vol. 249, pp. 531-32; Alford, *The Watchers*, p. 302.

<sup>93</sup> Edwards, *Plots and Plotters*, pp. 238-249.



Polwhele and Patrick Cullen. Whatever the actual reason Young's interrogation led to both Yorke and William's arrest and both were kept in the Tower.<sup>94</sup>

Edmund Yorke's first examination took place on 12 August 1594, before Essex and Lord Cobham. Yorke explained how Holt had wanted to send him to Scotland 'but [Yorke] knows not on what business'. He went to the Low Countries where he was reconciled to catholicism by Holt, as was Young. Furthermore, Holt gave Yorke 12 crowns when he left and told him to 'stay Catholic'. Yorke then accused Young of having 'offered to Fr Holt in writing to kill her Majesty on condition of the sum in hand and more afterwards'.<sup>95</sup> Yorke was examined again on the same day and admitted that Young had sworn to kill Elizabeth and Burghley, while he and Williams 'wished they had enough money to try if they would do' and that Williams was highly valued by Lieutenant Jacopo, Stanley's closest associate.<sup>96</sup> Williams was also examined on 12 August, twice, first by Essex, Cobham and now attorney general Sir Edward Coke. Williams' admitted to hearing Young and Yorke discussing the queen's assassination. In the second, before Essex and Cobham, he admitted that he had committed robbery in England and after went to France with Essex to serve under Sir Thomas Baskerville. He had then deserted to join the enemy and he also claimed he had been persuaded by Holt to join a Captain Dyer, a lieutenant in Stanley's regiment, 'in some service for the king of Spain'.<sup>97</sup>

Over the next three days (13 to 16 August) all three were interrogated again and again. Williams was also tortured before Essex and Cobham, 'Torture soon wrung from the poor wretch further avowals. He gave particulars of all the catholics and priests that he knew, and was ready to confess everything'.<sup>98</sup> These interviews confirmed what had been said before: that Yorke was to raise rebellion in North Wales with the help of Richard Williams with his Welsh catholic connections and that this was being funded and organised by Stanley and

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p. 240.

<sup>95</sup> Edmund Yorke's first examination, 12 August 1594, *CSPD*, 1591-94, vol. 249, p. 539.

<sup>96</sup> Edmund Yorke's second examination, 12 August 1594, *CSPD*, 1591-94, vol. 249, p. 540.

<sup>97</sup> Richard William's first examination, 12 August 1594, *CSPD*, 1591-94, vol 249, p. 541; Edwards, *Plots and Plotters*, pp. 243-44.

<sup>98</sup> Richard Williams, second examination, 13 August 1594, *CSPD*, 1591-94, vol. 249, p. 541.

Father Holt. Interestingly, Young mentioned that 'Yorke said he believed the lord treasurer had poisoned the young Earl of Derby to marry the young Lady Vere to the Earl's brother, England being governed by the Machiavellian policy of those who would be kings, and whom it is time to cut off'.<sup>99</sup> More telling still was that, as Yorke was a captain in Stanley's regiment, the rumour that the late Ferdinando Stanley, fifth Earl of Derby, had been poisoned was widespread amongst Stanley's men. Of course Sir William might want revenge for the death of one of his kin' especially if he thought that Burghley was responsible. But were Yorke and Williams the assassins chosen for such a dangerous task? Surely not, as Stanley would want this assassination attempt to succeed and this would require months of careful planning. This can be gauged by another of Yorke's examinations, this time on 21 August.

Yorke told Essex and Cobham he 'was first moved to destroy the queen by Father Holt in the Jesuits college, Brussels', and during last May, 'in .... Stanley's presence; they spoke of the difficulty of receiving his uncle's money unless he performed some service' and that also present were Sir Thomas Throckmorton and Charles Paget who 'promised him 40,000 crowns and told him that many at court would be glad and were looking for it'. Yorke had wanted 'a resolute man to execute the part, to further and rescue him if he could'. They had sent him with Williams, who was Throckmorton's cousin. Yorke then further implicated Williams by saying that both of them swore to kill the queen and Yorke to back him up if Williams failed. They would kill the queen by either poisoned arrow, pistol or rapier.<sup>100</sup> The remaining interviews were left to Sir Michael Blount, Francis Bacon and William Waad. Events then moved fairly swiftly, with Yorke and Williams indicted by attorney general Coke of the 'aggravated nature of their treason'.<sup>101</sup> Young wrote to Waad and Cobham, enclosing to Waad a report of a conversation Henry Young had heard whilst eavesdropping on two prisoners in the cell next to him and to Cobham that he had been spying long before he had come over to

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<sup>99</sup> Declaration of Henry Young, 16 August 1594, SP 12/249 ff.152-154r-v.

<sup>100</sup> Confession of Edward Yorke, 21 August 1594, CSPD, 1591-94, vol. 249, p. 548.

<sup>101</sup> Sir Edward Coke's notes and memoranda on the examinations of Yorke and Williams, [August 1594], SP 12/249 ff.219-220r-v.

England. There seems little doubt that Young was in fact a spy, but whether he was working for the privy council is hard to tell.<sup>102</sup>

There is only one definite reference to what happened to Yorke and Williams and it comes from a short passage in William Camden's *The history of ... Princess Elizabeth late Queen of England*. 'In the second Month of this Year [1595] Edmund York, Nephew to that York who betrayed the Fort of Zutphen to the Spaniards, and Richard Williams, both apprehended the last Year, [1594] as hath been said before suffered Death at Tyburn for High Treason'.<sup>103</sup>

Robert Cecil does not appear to have taken a lead role with either the interrogations or the trials of Yorke, Williams or Young. It was Essex who led the interrogations and thus could claim to have uncovered another plot, although it was highly unlikely to succeed. The examiners are also interesting to note, especially William Waad, who, having worked previously with the Cecils, also worked alongside Essex, meaning that the Cecils did not have a monopoly on the clerks working for the privy council. Cecil's absence can be explained by his involvement in the tangle of diplomatic relations between Elizabeth and the newly catholic convert Henry IV of France. During the summer of 1594, Elizabeth and the privy council wanted to know how Henry's conversion to Catholicism was going to affect their cooperation in the war against Spain. Was Henry going to continue their alliance or make peace with catholic Spain? The answer ended up being the continuation of the status quo for now, but this did not stop Elizabeth ordering Burghley, Cecil and the other members of the privy council to write a letter to the Archduke to sound out the possibility of peace to drive a wedge between Brussels and Madrid.<sup>104</sup> Although these negotiations came to nothing in the end, the result was the publication by the privy council of *The true report of sundrie Conspiracies complotted against the Queens most excellent Maiestie by many English traitorous rebels, and forraine*

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<sup>102</sup> Henry Young to Waad, 30 August 1594, SP 12/249 f.215r; Same to Cobham, at the Court, Greenwich, 31 August 1594, SP 12/249 f.216r.

<sup>103</sup> Camden, *The History of the Most Renowned ... Princess Elizabeth*, p. 495.

<sup>104</sup> Wernham, *Return of the Armadas*, pp. 8-14.

*Enemies*, which attacked the royal honour of the Archduke and Phillip II. This text and its context shall now be discussed.

#### The propaganda use of the Hesketh, four Irishmen and Lopez plots

With these plots uncovered, the privy council looked to exploit the propaganda value that these intrigues provided them. This section will analyse the resulting pamphlet and how the wording was used to inflame anti-Spanish sentiment and to reinforce the concept that England was still in great danger and surrounded by enemies. In November 1594, Burghley authorised the publication of a pamphlet entitled, *The true report of sundrie Conspiracies complotted against the Queens most excellent Maiestie by many English traitorous rebels, and forraine Enemies*. The publication starts by attacking the King of Spain and his ministers' 'uniust and dishonourable Actions ... contrarie to all warlike, Princely, Manlike and Christian examples in annie warres ... by attempting to teake the Queene of Englands life not by Armes or any warlike Actions, but secretly sundrie waies by secret murder, hatefull to God and man from the beginning of the world'.<sup>105</sup>

Straight away Burghley was making sure that the Spanish were understood to be behind the plots discovered throughout the year, even though any Spanish involvement in the plots was minimal at best. From the wording, the publications also calls into question Philip's masculinity in that he would rather assassinate the queen than face her armies in battle; Burghley may have been reinforcing the image of the warrior queen in armour during the Spanish armada to the populace. Of course the publication assures the reader that 'no like in fact being euer attempted or in mind intended by the Queene of England, the world shall manifestly see and iudge, which of these two Princes are to be condemned and their Actions abhorred'.<sup>106</sup> The

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<sup>105</sup> *A true report of sundrie Conspiracies of the late time detected to haue (by Barbarous murders) taken away the life of the Queenes most excellent Maiestie, whom Almighty God hath miraculously conserued against the treacheries of her Rebelles, and the violences of her most puissant Enemies*, printed by Charles Yetsweirt Esquire, (London, November 1594), p. 5.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid* p. 5.

bulk of the *True Report* is taken up by an explanation of the details of the Lopez plot and the charges against those involved. Throughout the text Lopez's reward of the £50,000 crowns is mentioned again and again to reinforce the view that it was the Spanish who funded the plot.<sup>107</sup> Burghley defended the queen's actions in executing Lopez, Andrada and de Gama, and laid the blame for their executions squarely at the feet of the King of Spain and his ministers:

Of the king of Spain ... if he shall not vpon information hereof acquit himself of the imputation of this dishonour and crime against God by due punishment of his counsellors, both for their owne factes and for their reports...which if he shall not performe, no person can blame hir Maiestie if shee shall take some other course, which she hath hitherto forborne to do. <sup>108</sup>

The next section of the publication tells the details of the plot committed by Yorke and Williams, the involvement of William Stanley and the support by the Jesuits Sherwood and Holt; they were also, alleged Burghley, involved in the plot surrounding the Irishman Patrick Cullen. The Hesketh plot was perpetrated by Cardinal Allen, William Stanley and the Jesuit Thomas Worthington, although the pamphlet commends Ferdinando Stanley, Earl of Derby for remaining loyal: he 'was so wise and dutiful as he stayed Hesketh, who vpon the Earles dutifull report was apprehended, & confessed the whol matter'.<sup>109</sup> However, the publication warns that there may be other plots that have not yet been discovered and therefore emphasised the need for the privy council to remain vigilant to ensure the queen's and ultimately the country's safety. 'Now though it is knowen that this maner of treacherous proceedings against her Maiesties life hath been often enterprised, and sometimes the offenders are taken and executed, and diuers others liuing obscurely, and not yet taken nor discovered'.<sup>110</sup>

*A True Report* concludes by underlining the comparison of the conduct of Philip II to Elizabeth, in that neither herself or any of her ministers have looked to plot against or assassinate the

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, pp. 8-13.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, p. 14-15.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, pp. 17-19.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

King of Spain, and that if the queen had found any of her ministers to have done so 'her Maiestie would forwith haue most seuerely punished such a person according to his desert, or deliuered him to the King to haue been by him punished at his pleasure'.<sup>111</sup> This pamphlet suggests the plots, serious or not, that were discovered throughout 1594 only strengthened Burghley's and Robert Cecil's belief that Spain and the seminary Jesuits were still active in their desire to topple Elizabeth and her government.

### Conclusion

The fact that these plots were discovered between September 1593 and June 1595 suggests that there were foreign parties that were looking to, if not to reinstate a catholic backed regime, then at least to cause disruption and confusion until Spain could be persuaded to launch a second armada. However, these plots had the opposite effect, as by the middle of 1595, the privy council were on a higher alert for catholic intrigue, with tighter control on the ports, access to the court and the queen's person. These plots have received little attention by historians even though they tell us that in the 1590s, just as in earlier periods, there were active forces looking to destabilise the Elizabethan regime, and that the privy council were still more than capable of thwarting any such plots. For Cecil it must have been a stark lesson that more prior warning was needed in order to stop any further plots occurring at their source. For Cecil personally, his position and political influence had grown considerably and in the years that followed he would put this influence to good use until, in July 1596, he finally achieved his long-held aim of becoming principal secretary and with that the adaptation and expansion of his own intelligence network.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, pp. 23-24.

After his work in helping to deal with the plots of 1593 to 1595, and with his father's health continuing to wane, Cecil was now in prime position to finally take over the vacant role of principal secretary. The office had been vacant since 1590 and there had been a political battle between the Cecils and Essex. Cecil had been expecting to be given the role whilst Essex had put forward William Davison, but Elizabeth would not be drawn on whom to choose and the position was left vacant. Cecil for his part needed to continue demonstrating to the queen that he was as near to his father, in terms of continuity, as she was ever going to get. He had to prove that he could manage the problems facing the Elizabethan state, which at this time included the rebellion in Ireland and financing the war effort across the Channel in France and the Low Countries. Therefore, in this chapter his dealings with the military commanders in Ireland and his cooperation with Essex during the latter's expeditions against Spain will be used to demonstrate how adept Cecil had become at managing crises and swift changes in policy. His burgeoning intelligence network was also put to the test during this time because of the armada scares of 1596 and 1597. These would test how effective his agents were at this time and whether the structures in place for the communication of this information were adequate. Cecil's focus thus shifted from internal security to foreign intelligence, largely because the privy council increasingly took a more aggressive, albeit limited, stance in its foreign policy in the face of the renewed threat from Spain. Essex was given command of a series of raids on the Spanish coast, most notably on Cadiz in 1596, which in turn led to the Spanish retaliating in launching two new armadas in 1596 and 1597.<sup>1</sup> With this in mind it is

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<sup>1</sup> The Spanish had also raided Mousehold in 1595 before the armadas under discussion in this chapter. See, Matthew Dimmock, 'Crusading Piracy? The Curious Case of the Spanish in the Channel, 1590-1595, in Claire Jowitt (ed.), *Pirates? The Politics of Plunder, 1550-1650*, (London 2007), pp. 74-89.

important to understand the role that Cecil's intelligence network played in the foreign policy sphere.

#### Cecil's activities prior to his appointment 1595-96

During 1595-96 we can see a distinct shift in Cecil's life. The influence of his father over Cecil's career was lessening, not least because of his ill health, but also because Cecil was beginning to take on more responsibility. This can be signified by Burghley sending over old correspondence about Ireland to him and advising him on how he should help guide the queen. 'I send you letters worth the reading, though some old date. The information for invasion of Ireland is worthy observation, and written over probably but for the Earl of Ormond, whose name I think is rather used to incite the Spaniard than upon sure ground, all the rest are very [likely] and over probable, and therefore Her Majesty's actions must not be protracted. Your loving Father'.<sup>2</sup> In a later letter he could not resist in giving some word of input: '[Despite] my healthe serveth mee not to enter into anie final consideracion herof, but onelie two thinges are necessarye: Increase of the forces ... The second is to send monie thither for maintenance of the Garrisons already in that Realme'.<sup>3</sup> Because of this increase in his responsibilities and influence, Cecil could not solely concentrate on intelligence gathering. The increase in his intelligence networks could not happen until he gained the post of principal secretary as that position was so closely associated with intelligence gathering. Therefore following the events that led up to his appointment, such as in Ireland and France, will give us important context as to what he had to do in order to finally convince the queen to appoint him to the post.

The situation in Ireland had slowly begun to escalate in 1594 to 1596, mostly because of the defeat of Elizabethan forces by a revolt led by an Irish chieftain, Hugh Maguire, in February

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<sup>2</sup> Burghley to Cecil, 30 June 1595, *CSP/ire*, 1592-1596, vol. 180, p. 334.

<sup>3</sup> Burghley to Cecil, 27 December, 1595, Letter no. 37, William Dixon Acres (ed.) *The letters of Lord Burghley, William Cecil, to his son Sir Robert Cecil*, 1593-1598, Camden Society, Fifth series, December 2017, vol. 53, pp. 87-293.



1594. This resulted in increased suspicion on both Hugh Roe O'Donnell and Hugh O'Neill, second Earl of Tyrone, about their loyalty to the English crown. O'Donnell then joined Maguire in an attack on the Enniskillen fortress in June 1594. The attack was a relative success; on 7 August, Irish forces surprised and managed to repulse an English force at the 'Ford of the Biscuits', in which nearly a quarter of the English soldiers were killed. Four days later, William Russell was sworn in as lord deputy of Ireland replacing William Fitzwilliam. O'Neill arrived in Dublin soon after to submit to the new lord deputy and offer his assistance in restoring peace. Nonetheless, Sir Henry Bagenel, marshal of the army in Ireland, prepared a list of charges against Tyrone, alleging that members of the Tyrone family with Archbishop Edmund MacGauran had involvement in Spanish-Papal schemes. But the evidence was thin and Russell allowed Tyrone to leave Dublin. Then in 1595, Tyrone moved closer to the rebels, because his desire to govern Ulster independently was thwarted by the English. On 25 May, Tyrone ambushed Bagenel's forces as they returned from relieving Monaghan castle, which had been captured by the rebels in February. Tyrone was now openly on the side of the rebels, but both sides wanted and needed a truce the English so that they could have time to bring over reinforcements from Brittany and the Irish so that they could request Spanish support. Both sides agreed a truce until January 1596, which was subsequently extended until May.<sup>4</sup> This then was the situation which Cecil, based in his office in London, had to grapple with in his correspondence from Ireland. Apart from corresponding with the lord deputy and keeping up with the victualling of the Elizabeth troops stationed there, Cecil was also interested in ascertaining just how serious the Spanish were in their willingness to help the Irish rebels.<sup>5</sup> This support could either come in the form of supplying arms or landing Spanish troops to help drive the Elizabethan forces from the island. This had been a deep rooted fear since England had entered into war with Spain in 1585, which only grew as rebellion in Ireland gained momentum. With English troops already committed to fighting in the Low Countries and now

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas M. McCoog, S.J., *The Society of Jesus in Ireland, Scotland and England, 1589-1597* (Farnham, 2012) pp.177-79; R.B. Wernham, *Return of the Armadas: The Last Years of the Elizabethan wars against Spain, 1595-1603* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 16-18.

<sup>5</sup> Lord Deputy Russell to Cecil, *CSP Ire*, 1592-1596, vol. 178, pp. 292,293, 299, 319.

its fleet raiding the Spanish coast, if Spain were able to land and use Ireland as a launchpad to attack England then there would be very little experienced military forces for the privy council to draw upon to defend the country.

From January 1595, Cecil started receiving worrying reports of both Spanish troops and ships being mustered to land in either Ireland or Scotland. One report sent to Cecil via lord deputy Russell was written by a Dr Robert Brown detailing how he learned that 'the King of Spain hath in Ferrol and Lisbon a great armada in readiness, nothing inferior to the first that came hither, and there is great report among them that the King will help the catholics of Scotland and Ireland'. Equally worrying, Brown heard that 'between the Earl of Tirone and the [Scottish catholic] Earl of Huntly there is a league or confederacy one with the other, and in all will go forward in their purpose'.<sup>6</sup> Another intelligence report stated that ships had been sent to Lisbon by the direction of the King of Spain to receive 8,000 soldiers bound for the north of Ireland. Luckily for the English, 30,000 ducats had been lost at sea when the galleon Zabra that had departed from Laredo had sunk, 30 miles west of Santander, in August 1594.<sup>7</sup>

Because of these disturbing reports, and the fact that Tyrone and the other Irish rebels were gaining the upper hand against the English forces, it was decided by Elizabeth and her privy council to transfer Sir John Norreys, and some 1,200 of his veterans of the campaign in the Low Countries, to Ireland, arriving in April 1595. It was left to Burghley and Cecil to help organise and raise the victuals for the transfer of Norrey's troops. Burghley informed his son that he had an agreement with George Beverley to victual 1000 soldiers for three months at '6d. per diem' and that he sent a letter to Sir Henry Wallop to deliver to him £1,640.<sup>8</sup>

Once Norreys had arrived in Ireland he started corresponding with Cecil, informing him of his disagreements with both Bagenal and lord deputy Russell, and his reports of the Irish rebel forces and his engagements with them. Not every Elizabethan official wanted Norreys in

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<sup>6</sup> A relation given to the Lord Deputy, [28 January] 1595, *CSPIre*, 1592-1596, vol. 178, pp. 293-94.

<sup>7</sup> Intelligences lately come out of Spain, January 1595, *CSPIre*, 1592-1596, vol. 178, p. 294.

<sup>8</sup> Burghley to Cecil, 4 February 1595, *CSPIre*, 1592-1596, vol. 178, p. 295.

Ireland as they thought that he would undermine their position. Indeed Adam Loftus, lord chancellor of Ireland, recommended 'Sir Richard Bingham as a fitter man than Sir John Norreys to subdue the rebels. His happy success has wrought an exceeding great fear of him in all the traitors, and as for toil and travail few private soldiers can go beyond him'.<sup>9</sup> Norreys for his part complained to Cecil on numerous occasions. In one letter Norreys was annoyed that Russell had reduced his nineteen bands to only twelve. Norreys warned that this 'is the first fruit of the spleen which, if it continue, will breed no advancement to the service'.<sup>10</sup> This querulousness between commanders was a perennial feature of Elizabethan warfare dating back to Leicester's expedition to the Low Countries in 1585 and through to Essex's raids along the Spanish coast. This was because the majority of English military commanders wanted to strike a decisive blow and gain all the political plaudits and prestige that would come with it, often at the expense of a well thought out and concerted strategy.<sup>11</sup>

Cecil's growing role in Ireland, then, can be seen as essentially crisis management. His task was to bring some order to the conflicting reports between Russell on the one hand and Norreys on the other. He also acted as another conduit to the queen and the privy council by passing on both men's requests for men and materials. As William Dixon Acres has shown, Cecil's influence and management of Elizabethan affairs in Ireland started from 1593 and played an important role in the queen's decision to grant him the principal secretaryship.<sup>12</sup> His long term position in the government of Ireland was that of a mediator and a conduit by which the lord deputies could convey their pleas for men and material to the queen and the privy council. Importantly, from 1596 onwards, Cecil gained more and more influence over how much was spent on the Irish problem.<sup>13</sup> Cecil's own stance on Ireland was that it should be dealt with first before any treaty with Spain should be signed, as it would give the English a stronger position to argue terms. This view was expressed during his embassy to France in

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<sup>9</sup> Lord Chancellor Loftus to Cecil, 19 March 1595, *CSP Ire*, 1592-1596, vol. 178, p. 305.

<sup>10</sup> Sir John Norreys to Cecil, 14 April 1595, *CSP Ire*, vol. 179, p. 312.

<sup>11</sup> Wallace MacCaffrey, *Queen Elizabeth and the making of policy, 1572-1588* (Princeton, 1981), chapter 14; Wernham, *Return of the Armadas*, chapters 7 and 12.

<sup>12</sup> Acres, 'Sir Robert Cecil', pp. 193-348.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 209-22.

April and May 1598: he wrote to his father 'that it be expedient, if Ireland were but reduced by ye colour of a Treaty, I wold not tarry, for if Ireland were not [reduced], I protest I wold not in my poor Judgment carre what France dyd'.<sup>14</sup> For the time being, the best that Cecil could do was to maintain the truce that was already in place, as by 1596 the privy council's focus was shifted to the continent and the attempt to land a blow against Spain. In this regard, Cecil's next task would be to assist in Essex's expedition to Calais.

### Essex's intended expedition to Calais

Essex's expedition to reinforce Calais came when he, along with the Lord Admiral Charles Howard, were planning another expedition against Spain. A sudden Spanish thrust towards Calais in early March 1596 panicked Elizabeth and her privy council. This was because with Calais under Spanish control it would be much easier to get troops across to attack the English mainland. To prevent this, Elizabeth authorised Essex and Howard to prepare a relief operation of 6,000 men; Cecil was to help organise along with Essex.<sup>15</sup> Essex wrote to him on 5 April expressing his appreciation that Elizabeth had chosen to 'refer things in this service to my discretion [which] infinitely encourages me, and doubles the edge of my wits, and the strength of my industry. I can show nothing but discretion in this action'; he hoped that 'she will neither receive a jot of dishonour, nor think she could have picked a more careful nurse [Cecil] to preserve her valiant subjects'.<sup>16</sup> There are several letters that were written throughout early to mid-April whereby Essex discusses with Cecil issues such as his own thoughts for the coming expedition, the news that he can glean about the morale and activities of the Spanish and of the queen's health and her disposition towards him.

Essex wrote again to Cecil from Dover, where he and Howard were waiting to embark their troops, expressing how he 'never [saw] so afflicted a man as the Lord Admiral with your letter.

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<sup>14</sup> Cecil to Burghley, 4 April 1598, SP 78/42 f.11r.

<sup>15</sup> Hammer, *Elizabeth's Wars*, p. 193.

<sup>16</sup> Essex to Cecil, 5 April 1596, SP 12/257 f.15r-v.

'By Christ, I am so sensible of it as I have written to the queen in passion. I pray you, as you love either of us, or the service, get it discharged, for we shall have infinite honour without fighting. The newes of the succour of Callis I shall write my l[ette]rs to her g[race]'.<sup>17</sup> The letter that Essex was referring to could have been her instructions, which Cecil drafted and corrected, that offered contradictory and confusing orders not to cross to Calais unless Henry IV, King of France, would cover her expenses and the town could actually be saved. Essex and Howard's soldiers were to be used as auxiliaries and not to come under the command of the French.<sup>18</sup> Essex was so worried about the tone of Howard's reply to the queen's instructions that he advised Cecil not to deliver the letter to the queen. 'I pray you show not my Lord Admiral's letter to the queen, for it is too passionate, and it may break all our actions, if she take him at his word'.<sup>19</sup> These exchanges of letters show that rather than being seen in a constant state of rivalry for position and the queen's attention there were, as Paul Hammer has shown, periods when Essex and the Cecil's worked together on certain matters important to the queen or for political convenience.<sup>20</sup> Even though the forces mustered to relieve Calais were eventually not used, as Elizabeth could not decide whether to commit so many troops at one time, much to Essex's frustration, the proposed relief of Calais does give another example of both men working in tandem for the same goal.<sup>21</sup>

In spite of this, as has been shown in chapter two, there had been an underlying rivalry between Essex and Cecil in regard to gaining influential offices of state. This had been shown in 1594 with the vacancy of the attorney generalship, which had eventually gone to the Cecil candidate Sir Edward Coke, at the expense of the Essex-backed Anthony Bacon.<sup>22</sup> This rivalry, apparently forgotten but at other times expressed in the open, continued to simmer away throughout the mid-1590s. Burghley usually managed to balance the two younger men's

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<sup>17</sup> Essex to Cecil, 13 April 1596, SP 12/257 f.44r.

<sup>18</sup> Instructions from the Queen for the Earl of Essex, 13 April 1596, SP 12/257 f.37r-v.

<sup>19</sup> Essex to Cecil, 13 April 1596, SP 12/257 f.44r.

<sup>20</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, pp. 190, 264-65.

<sup>21</sup> Hammer, *Elizabeth's Wars*, pp. 193-94.

<sup>22</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, pp. 346-47.

rivalries, in part because Essex always respected Burghley, much more than he ever did Cecil, who he saw as inferior to himself.<sup>23</sup>

Cecil's correspondence with Russell, Norreys and Essex during these months shows that, although these men corresponded with other privy councillors, Cecil was increasingly in a position of influence on the privy council, such that he was worth keeping in favourable contact with. That these men chose to air their grievances and keep him informed of their respective spheres of influence also reflects the fact that he was working closely with the queen. Examples of this developing working relationship can be seen not only in his draft of her instructions to Essex, but also in the queen's letter to Essex, in which, after asking him to follow her instructions and to ensure his own safety, she finishes the letter by saying 'Believe Cecil in the rest'.<sup>24</sup>

Further evidence can be found in Cecil's own letter to his friend Sir George Carew, Lieutenant of the Ordnance in England, in which he discussed with Carew a conversation that he had with the queen regarding his upcoming departure to accompany Essex on his expedition to Cadiz later in the year. She was worried by reports that Carew would join the expedition to make his own profit and wanted Carew to come to see her to explain himself in his own words. The letter also gives another sharp reminder of the queen's love of keeping her servants on their toes: 'I was asked to-night by Her Majesty what had become of Sir George Carew, and mistaking her words, replied he was gone to Dover; she answered somewhat sharply that it was you, and not the other Sir George, she enquired after'. He ends the letter by assuring Carew that 'I never believed that you could be thus guilty, but reposed in you. I never believed that you could be thus guilty, but ask, as a friend, what you wish to have said.'<sup>25</sup> Evidently, Cecil had already demonstrated his ability in supervising and assisting in two important fronts

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<sup>23</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, pp. 345-47.

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth I to the Earl of Essex, 14 April 1596, SP 12/257 f.46r.

<sup>25</sup> Cecil to Sir George Carew, 22 April 1596, SP 12/257 f.53r-v.

in which Elizabethan forces were engaged, earning him the queen's confidence and support for the time being.

#### Cecil's appointment as Principal Secretary

Cecil was rewarded for his diligent work over the previous five years when on 5 July 1596 the queen finally saw fit to officially appoint him as her principal secretary.<sup>26</sup> His promotion came about because he had made himself indispensable to the queen in carrying out the onerous paperwork that came with the position. He had the necessary bureaucratic training to take up the role after years spent performing different tasks and roles within the administration of government. Even though it was his father's influence that launched his political career, it still came down to Cecil to seize the opportunity. Pauline Croft has drawn attention to his willingness, at times, to engage in courtly skills in the lover-like style that Elizabeth liked.<sup>27</sup> He described the queen in a letter to her as God's 'celestial Creature, who please the out of Angellyke grace, to pardone and allowe my carefull and zealous desires', and that he 'can please none because I thirst only to please one'.<sup>28</sup> A good secretary had to combine the skills of a senior civil servant and a courtier.

The timing of his appointment was also significant as it came whilst Essex was away with lord admiral Howard on their raid on the Spanish coast. Despite capturing Cadiz, Essex's request that it should be garrisoned and used as means to deter further armadas was denied by Elizabeth and thus he was forced to abandon it. This meant that Essex had only won a victory abroad at the cost of giving ground domestically to Cecil; this went against the agreement that Essex thought he had had with the queen to not decide the issue of the principal secretaryship before he had returned from Spain.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, pp. 268-71; Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, p. 267

<sup>27</sup> Pauline Croft, 'Can a Bureaucrat be a Favourite? Robert Cecil and the Strategies of Power', in J.H. Elliott and L.W.B. Brockliss (eds.), *The World of the Favourite* (London, 1999), pp. 81-82.

<sup>28</sup> Cecil to Elizabeth I, 19 Sept [1592], *HMCS*, 1590-1594, vol. 4, p. 632.

<sup>29</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, p. 368.

This leads us to ask why the post of principal secretary was so important. The post gained importance during the time of Thomas Cromwell, who helped to pass the Act of Precedence of 1539, which clarified its role within the government of Henry VIII. Its importance came from enabling the holder to have frequent access to the monarch and thus the centre of political power. The duties of the position were wide and varied. The holder's role was primarily that of the linkman: the primary connection between monarch, council and Parliament. He instructed the crown's officials both at home and abroad and he had control of the signet office, which authenticated documents on their way to the chancery and the exchequer. Crucially, he could choose to delay or stop grants of patronage, which was one reason why Cecil coveted this position so highly: at a stroke it made him, besides the queen, the most powerful patronage-giver in the realm. On a more mundane level, he had to process all incoming reports, both domestic and foreign, which included the policies of countries abroad, maintenance and arming of the militia, suitability of the coastal defences, the loyalties and dynastic machinations of the gentry, the list of recusants and, as we have already seen, the affairs of Ireland, and many others.<sup>30</sup>

In order to get a clearer sense of how Cecil may have seen his new office, we can look at two contemporary treatises: Robert Beale's 'A Treatise of the Office of Councillor and Principall Secretarie to her Ma[jes]tie' and Nicholas Faunt's 'A Discourse touching the Office of Principal Secretary of Estate, &c. 1592'.<sup>31</sup> Beale was clerk of the privy council from 1572 until his death in 1601, in which time he had served under Sir Francis Walsingham during his secretaryship, sometimes even stepping in when Walsingham was absent through illness. He was also a seasoned diplomat, having served in France and the Low Countries, making him well versed in the different facets of the role.<sup>32</sup> Nicholas Faunt also served as one of Walsingham's most

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<sup>30</sup> Penry Williams, *The Tudor Regime* (Oxford, 1979, reprinted 1981), pp. 44-46.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Beale, *A Treatise of the Office of Councillor and Principall Secretarie to her Ma[jes]tie*, in three parts, in Conyers Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham* (London 1925), iii, Appendix, pp. 423-443; Nicholas Faunt, *Discourse touching the Office of Principal Secretary of Estate &c. 1592*, edited and printed by Charles Hughes, *EHR*, vol. 20, no. 79 (July 1905), pp. 499-508.

<sup>32</sup> Mark Tavinor, 'Robert Beale and the Elizabethan Polity', (Unpublished PhD thesis, St Andrews, 2000), pp. 150, 154-155.



trusted secretaries. Between 1578 and his master's death in 1590, Faunt travelled extensively through France, Germany and Italy, carrying secret messages to English agents and sending back his own reports to Walsingham. This meant that Faunt had had a first hand perspective on the challenges that came with maintaining an intelligence network, including issues such as the difficulty in conveying secret messages, dealing with different agents, and keeping the lines of communication as workable as possible. He died in 1608 after a modest career in the Elizabeth bureaucracy.<sup>33</sup>

Both Beale's and Faunt's treatises discuss at length the complex administrative and legal mechanisms which made up the role, and each details the extensive recordkeeping that was needed to categorise the copious amounts of paperwork that came with it.<sup>34</sup> Both treatises also dealt with maintaining an intelligence network and how this should be managed. Beale emphasised that a principal secretary should 'Lett your secret services be knowne to a few[e] [secretaries], the Lord Thr[esur]er Burghley, being Secretary, had not above two or three'.<sup>35</sup> Faunt echoes this by insisting that two servants would be sufficient to deal with 'Forraine matters' and that one of these servants should 'chiefly attend vnto matters of intelligence Cyfers and secret advertisements to keep first in good order toe extract the substance of them'.<sup>36</sup> He even goes into the minutiae of where these secret papers should be kept and who should have access.

[It is] needful yt [that] hee prepare certaine Cabinettes or Coffers fitt to keep such thinges as hee shalbee accomptable for in particuler .... Ye Sec: [must] haue one more speciall to himself of the freshest matters yt occurred whereof hee onely Reserueth the Key to himself, yett oftentimes hee must Committ ye secretest things to the trust of this servant ... these employmentes bee of the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 122.

<sup>34</sup> Acres, 'Sir Robert Cecil', p. 69.

<sup>35</sup> Beale, *A Treatise*, p. 427.

<sup>36</sup> Faunt, *A Discourse*, p. 502.

highest trust, soe must the servant trusted therewith bee of speciall trust both for honestie and other good sufficiencie.<sup>37</sup>

Clearly Cecil had to choose his servants carefully as, even though intelligence may at times be dubious, he would have to rely heavily on the servants and clerks to sift through the copious amounts of correspondence he was likely to receive.

Furthermore, it is plausible that Cecil was influenced by Beale's previous experience, or that he may have leant on him for support. In his treatise, Beale offered both practical advice for performing the role and also the sort of tasks that the principal secretary was expected to perform. These included monitoring the clerks of the council to make sure that they keep accurate and reliable records of privy council meetings, kept books of maps of England, notes on principal noble families in England, Wales and Ireland, on the coastal towns and who was in command of them, the muster numbers for every county in England and the English merchant companies who traded 'beyond the seas'.<sup>38</sup> Importantly, the secretary was also to have a book detailing 'matters concerning Religion, of Recusants in every shire, of their bondes, placinges, children, &c.; of the examin[i]ons of Priests and Traitors, to confer [compare] them together, w[h]ich cannot be when some parcells [packages] are in one man's handes and some in another'.<sup>39</sup> This insistence on ensuring that a principal secretary surrounded himself with 'discreet persons' and servants who were trustworthy can be found frequently throughout the treatise.

Cecil went against Beale's suggestion that only two or at most three secretaries were enough, presumably so that the workload of the principal secretaryship could be delegated for greater efficiency. For example, between 1596 and 1600, Cecil had three specialist secretaries: Richard Perceval, who dealt with wardship business; Levinus Munck for foreign correspondence; and Simon Willis, who dealt with intelligence matters. By 1610, this number

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<sup>37</sup> Faunt, *A Discourse*, pp. 502-03.

<sup>38</sup> Beale, *A Treatise*, pp. 423-442.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 429.

had grown to seven or eight, with four specialists, Perceval, Munck and now John Dacombe and Dudley Norton, and three 'non-specialist' secretaries, who assisted Cecil with his personal correspondence and the paperwork that came with the other senior offices that he then held: principal secretary, master of the wards and lord treasurer.<sup>40</sup>

This system of senior and junior secretaries gave each man training in the different areas of his role. An example of this is Levinus Munk, a Dutchman, employed by Cecil from 1596, who at first dealt with foreign correspondence, but with Willis's departure in 1601, Munck took over Cecil's intelligence correspondence as well. Younger, less experienced secretaries could, in time, gain the skills to either take over from older colleagues or move on to more senior roles within the Elizabethan bureaucracy.<sup>41</sup>

Beale did caution that Cecil and other principal secretaries should 'Be not to credulous lest you be deceived; heare all reports but trust not all; weigh them w[i]th time and deliberac[i]on and be not to liberall of trifles; observe them that deale on both handes least you be deceived.'<sup>42</sup> This would have been especially apt for Walsingham and Cecil as they both struggled to make sense of the mass of letters and petitions coming from their agents all over Europe and beyond. Beale devoted a section of his treatise to the running of an intelligence network, dealing with Germany, Scotland, Denmark, France and Spain. His means of gathering intelligence were different depending on each specific country. For instance, in Scotland, Beale asserts that there were many nobles and minsters there who would provide news; for France, the principal secretary should rely on intelligence from the governors of Jersey and Guernsey; for Italy and Germany, the merchants stationed there should be utilised. Lastly, for Spain, he advised that 'I knowe not anie other course that can be holden but by money'. But, Beale warned, 'take heed they [the agents] deale not double w[i]th you and abuse you w[i]th toyes and matters of their own invenc[i]on.'<sup>43</sup> Both Walsingham and Cecil followed

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<sup>41</sup> A.G.R. Smith, 'The Secretariats of the Cecils, c. 1580-1612', *EHR*, vol. 83, no. 328 (July 1968), pp. 481- 504, esp. pp. 495-497, 502-504.

<sup>42</sup> Beale, *A Treatise*, p. 427.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p. 437.

this to some degree but they were also not afraid to make use of specialist agents such as Robert Poley, Gilbert Gifford and Richard Chomley, as well as seminary priests they had managed to turn to their cause, such as John Cecil. Lastly, on the financing of an intelligence network, Beale explicitly advised that a principal secretary may be called into question for the use of privy seals to finance agents abroad. To avoid this 'you shall doe well to keepe unto yourself a speciall note what sum[m]es you have delivered out and how the same Privie Seales have bine employed and may be answered and discharged if cause require'.<sup>44</sup>

Faunt's treatise, *A Discourse touching the Office of Principal Secretary & Estates*, follows a similar pattern of themes as Beale's, in that the trustworthiness and loyalty of a principal secretary's servants was paramount. 'For if the servant take his Charge in hand hee must give himself wholly to his Master, hee must in a manner cast out the care of his private estate to thend hee may chiefly attend and intend this service'.<sup>45</sup> In the main, Cecil's secretaries remained loyal and long serving, especially Richard Perceval and Levinus Munck, who served him respectively from 1594 and 1596 until Cecil's death in 1612.<sup>46</sup> Again, the majority of Cecil's secretaries benefitted from their working relationship with such a powerful patron and most moved on to distinguished administrative roles, either during their master's life or after his death. For example Thomas Wilson, who worked with Munck on Cecil's intelligence reports, left Cecil's service in 1610 when he was appointed keeper of the state paper office.<sup>47</sup> The long-serving Perceval, despite being dismissed from the court of wards office shortly after Cecil's death, was in 1616 appointed a clerk in a commission to regulate wardship in Ireland and shrewdly sold his estate in Somerset for mortgages in the city of Cork, thus enabling him to amass a great fortune for himself and his heirs to enjoy.<sup>48</sup>

The second half of Faunt's treatise takes the reader through the various books and ledgers that a principal secretary should have and that his secretaries should maintain. He

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<sup>44</sup> Beale, *A Treatise*, p. 437.

<sup>45</sup> Faunt, *Discourse*, p. 501.

<sup>46</sup> A.G.R. Smith, 'The Secretariats of the Cecils', see note no. 2, p. 482.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 497, 502-3.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 502-04.

recommended numerous books, and the lists of contents for each book that someone like Cecil was supposed to keep track of were, quite frankly, astonishing. These included (but were not limited to): books 'peculiar for forraigne' services, a survey of all the ships in the queen's navy, a book regarding the maintenance and number of trained bands that could be called upon, and the expenses of the queen's household and court, plus much more.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the principal secretary was advised to 'devide and measure the day soe neare as hee canne accordinge to the ordinarie business thereof beinge of the greatest weight and most needfull of dispatch'.<sup>50</sup> To this end, he was to keep a 'generall memorial booke' about his private chambers so that he could instantly consult it once he had risen from his bed or even while he was still abed. Additionally, in aid of this record-keeping, a journal was to be made 'wherein continually to bee recorded, the certaine day of the month and the howers when anie dispatch is made or received'.<sup>51</sup> This enabled someone like Cecil to keep track of all his incoming and outgoing letters and their destinations so that the loss of these messages could be minimised. For Faunt and Beale, the main attributes that made a good incumbent of the role were good organisational skills and good judgement in selecting their subordinates. This Cecil must have had in abundance, in order to have been able to remain in the role for nearly two decades, alongside his other governmental positions.

Like Beale and Faunt before him, Cecil understood the workload placed upon him, which is why he expanded his secretariat, from the two he originally employed when he gained the secretaryship in 1596, to eight by the years 1609-10.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, it is reasonable to suggest that Beale would have approved of the way he not only performed the duties of a principal secretary, but also the way in which he ran his intelligence network, albeit he might have been mildly alarmed at how many secretaries he eventually employed.

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<sup>49</sup> Faunt, *Discourse*, pp. 506-507.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 503.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 503-4.

<sup>52</sup> A.G.R. Smith, 'The Secretariats of the Cecils', p. 482.

Cecil also had his own opinions on what the position entailed and how a principal secretary should act. He openly acknowledged that it was hard work. He admitted as much to his friend Sir George Carey, 'God Knoweth I labour like a Pack horse, and know that if success be nought it wilbe scorn to me'.<sup>53</sup> He also wrote a treatise, which survives in a copy dated to May 1612. In this 'Treatise by Robert late Earl of Salisbury on the dignity and duties of a Secretary of State', he emphasised that the main component of a good secretary was to retain the trust and love of the sovereign that he served:

ye place of a secr[etar]y is dreadful if he serue not a constant Prince, for as he yt [that] liueth by trust ought to serue truly, soe he yt [that] is content to liue as mereie [merry] had need be carefull in choice of a master yt [that] he be just and be bonne [good] nature'.<sup>54</sup>

Cecil also admitted that the role could make one a target of jealousy by other councillors because the secretary had the most access to the sovereign: 'all men of warre doe maligne them, except they winke at th[ei]r deceipts, th[ei]r fellow counsellrs enuye [envy] them because they haue most accesse, and when soeuer a Prince hath cause to delay or desiste, to search or to punish, none soe soone beares soe much burthen [burden]'.<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, when the monarch put forward an unpopular policy or dithered, it was always his or her principal secretary that would receive the animosity of the councillors and court. The main role of the secretary, according to him, was to have 'libertie to negotiate at discreation at home and abroad wth friends and enemyes in all matters of search and intelligence'.<sup>56</sup>

Evidently matters of intelligence were important to him, as were the private conversations that the secretary had with his prince, which he likened to a form of marriage:

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<sup>53</sup> John Maclean (ed.), *Letters from Sir Robert Cecil to Sir George Carew, Camden Society, New Series*, no. 88, (London, 1884-5), p. 26

<sup>54</sup> Treatise by Robert late Earl of Salisbury on the dignity and duties of a Secretary of State, May? 1612, SP 14/69 ff.78r-v-79r.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, SP 14/69 f.78v.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, SP 14/69 f.78v.

anie matter of weight is handled only between ye Prince and ye secr[etar]y, those counsailes are compared to mutual affect[ti]on of two louers, undiscovered to their friends, when it comes to be disputed in counsaile, it is likened to Conference of Parents and solemnisation of marriage.<sup>57</sup>

He also viewed, with a hint of poetic license, the other privy councillors as children who have to be guided by their parents, namely the secretary and the monarch. Crucially, in his mind the role of the secretary gave that person precedence over any other in the monarch's service.<sup>58</sup> This was why he strove for so many years to attain this position as, no matter how many successful military campaigns that his rivals won, he would always have those private daily audiences where the real political power laid. This did not mean that Cecil could dominate the queen or the privy council completely; even after the arrest and execution of Essex in 1601, he would never be able to replicate the special relationship which his father had had with Elizabeth. Though she was ailing, Elizabeth could still put Cecil in his place when angered, but, through the training and mindset that Burghley had instilled in him, his purpose was to serve and never to dominate the queen.

#### The Armada scares of 1596 and 1597

The first major test that faced the new principal secretary came in the winter of 1596/97 when the Spanish sent a fresh armada against England while Essex and Howard had taken the bulk of the English fleet to attack Cadiz, leaving the English coastline defended thinly or not at all. That the Spanish launched an attack in the 'closed season' came as a great shock to Elizabeth and her privy council.<sup>59</sup> It must have been the same for Cecil, as he received little or no word of the armada until Essex had returned and the queen's ships had been laid up in Chatham for the winter. The only warning that he had from his agents was a short letter from Thomas

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, SP 14/69 f.78v.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, SP 14/69 f.79r.

<sup>59</sup> Hammer, *Elizabeth's Wars*, pp. 198-9.

Honiman, a merchant contact and one of Cecil's most used agents, based in Bayonne, in which he warned 'the Spaniards have made a great search as to the state of Plymouth; I hope their object is not to spoil some of those quarters'.<sup>60</sup>

It must have been even more galling for Cecil that it was Essex who was able to provide the privy council with the most up to date intelligence on the Spanish preparations. His source came from a Portuguese sailor who had been captured by two small English navy ships and had been interrogated on 29 September in Southampton.<sup>61</sup> One of the Portuguese sailors, Emmanuel Alphonso, stated that Martín de Padilla, the naval commander, had 3 weeks prior set out from Lisbon with 30 warships and 70 transport ships which carried 15,000 or 18,000 troops. On 19 October they had entered Ferrol and were awaiting other ships from the Straits, Andalusia and Biscay, to join them there.<sup>62</sup> In this instance, it was Essex that had gained the upper hand in the intelligence-gathering stakes.

This led to Essex taking the initiative in submitting eleven questions for discussion by the privy council, ranging from where the Spanish might land to what they intended to do with their armada. The members of the privy council all agreed that the Spanish intended a full scale invasion but there was a divergence of opinion as to where they would land and how the Elizabethan forces were to counter them. A number of potential landings sites were mooted, including the Isle of Wight, the Thames estuary, Plymouth or Brest. It was Burghley who correctly guessed that the armada were aiming for Falmouth. There were also those on the privy council who did not have confidence in the trained bands. However, Burghley and Cecil did and they wanted them organised in large groups to cover as many of the potential landing sites as possible.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas Honiman to Cecil, 9 July 1596, *HMCS*, 1596, vol. 6, p. 249.

<sup>61</sup> Wernham, *Return of the Armadas*, pp.129-30; Wallace McCaffrey, *Elizabeth I: War and Politics, 1588-1603* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 123-24.

<sup>62</sup> Wernham, *Return of the Armadas*, p. 129.

<sup>63</sup> McCaffrey, *War and Politics*, pp. 124-25; Wernham, *After the Armada*, pp. 130-31.



Throughout November, the privy council issued a stream of orders to reinforce coastal defences and ready the trained bands to repel an invasion. Burghley had written out his 'advise' for best defending the realm by raising the trained bands in the south-western and south-eastern counties, and all nobles and gentlemen who were not already serving were to be mobilised. All recusants were to be watched or imprisoned and the parents of catholic emigres were not allowed to correspond with them lest they reveal how ill prepared England was. Food was to be removed from coastal areas; grindstones were to be taken away from mills; roads were to be blocked up; fresh water was to be made undrinkable and explosives to be prepared to burn Spanish ships should they land along south coast havens.<sup>64</sup>

Cecil also played his part in helping to organise the defences. On 4 November he drafted notes on the potential landing points: 'many think they [the Spanish] will invade the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth, and Southampton, or attack London from the Thames ... the forces should be made ready, armies raised, and victuals provided at London, Portsmouth, and Exeter; also gunpowder, and arms for 20,000 men'.<sup>65</sup> He also assisted in organising the trained bands, where they should be raised and should rendezvous and their supply of gunpowder and provisions. He paid special attention to Kent and Sussex, with the aim to muster '10,000 foot and 680 horse, to assemble at Canterbury and Sittingbourne; of commissions to the Lord Treasurer, and for a General'.<sup>66</sup>

It was extremely fortunate that these men and munitions were ultimately not needed, as the seasonal gales that had kept the Elizabethan fleet stuck in port had scattered the Spanish ships after only four days out from leaving its port. This armada, which had consisted of 100 ships, including 30 galleons, was more manoeuvrable than its 1588 predecessor, but the storm destroyed a quarter of its ships and around 3000 men were lost. It was not until late November

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<sup>64</sup> Advice by Lord Burghley upon the best mode of defending the realm, 4 November 1596, SP 12/260 ff.136-140r-v.

<sup>65</sup> A concordance of opinions in the expectation of the Adelantado, 4 November 1596, *CSPD*, 1595-97, vol. 260, p. 303.

<sup>66</sup> 'What armies to be made' notes by Cecil, 4 November 1596, SP 12/260 144r-v.

that certain news of the destroyed armada reached the privy council and the mobilization of the country was called off.<sup>67</sup>

Exactly the same scenario happened just a year later in 1597. In keeping with the Elizabethan policy of forward naval defence, a strategy that had been agreed in 1588, Essex was given orders to prepare a naval and expedition force to attack Ferrol. This was by far the best-prepared expeditionary force sent forth by the Elizabethan government. It comprised 4,000 'elite' militia that Essex had raised especially for this operation, alongside 1,000 veterans of the fighting in Low Countries under the command of Sir Francis Vere; the fleet included 15 front-line warships, including the captured Spanish ships San Andres and San Mateo a squadron provided by the Dutch and enough armed merchant ships to fill out three squadrons.<sup>68</sup> Things however began to fall apart, with July storms battering most of the fleet back home into port. They tried again and set sail in August only for more storms to scatter the troop ships and cripple both the San Andres and San Mateo making the taking of Ferrol unlikely. Essex settled in to just blockade the port but the temptation to intercept the Spanish flotilla coming from the New World proved too great. Unfortunately, Essex's fleet just missed out on intercepting the ships carrying the gold that he had hoped to appease the queen with.<sup>69</sup>

This had left the English coasts once more vulnerable to another armada which was massing in Ferrol. Comprising 136 ships, 9,000 troops and 4,000 sailors, the new armada did not set sail until late October 1597. Its aim was to land troops at Falmouth and seize the forts guarding the harbour and the town of Plymouth if possible. Once the troops had landed, the fleet was to anchor off the Scilly Isles and ambush Essex's returning fleet as it made its way home. In the spring of 1598, the garrison at Falmouth was to be reinforced and resupplied so that the Spanish fleet could challenge the Royal Navy for control of the western approaches into Brittany and Ireland, thereby supporting both the Irish rebellion and its own army in the Low

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<sup>67</sup> Hammer, *Elizabeth's Wars*, p. 199; Wernham, *Return of the Armadas*, pp. 129-32.

<sup>68</sup> Hammer, *Elizabeth's Wars*, p. 202; Wernham, *Return of the Armadas*, pp. 140-43.

<sup>69</sup> Hammer, *Elizabeth's Wars*, pp. 202-3.

Countries.<sup>70</sup> The privy council was still completely in the dark as the Spanish fleet neared the Lizard where it was finally sighted. Luckily, fierce storms again scattered the armada and forced Padilla, the naval commander, to return to A Coruña on 20 October with 108 of the 136 ships that he had left Ferrol with on 9 October. Not for the first time, the weather had come to England's rescue.<sup>71</sup>

Also for a second time, Burghley had to draw up notes to muster what men and ships they could for the defence of the south coast. 6000 men from the trained bands were earmarked for Devon under Sir William Courtney, while others were sent to Dorset, the Isle of Wight and Portsmouth. Sir Henry Palmer was to take what ships he could, with the help of ships from the Low Countries, to defend Weymouth, Plymouth and, crucially given the armada's intentions, Falmouth.<sup>72</sup> Just like the year before, Cecil had to answer queries from the rest of the privy council and their subordinates regarding how best to resist a Spanish invasion. Such enquiries included that of Henry Cobham, Cecil's brother-in-law, who wanted him to persuade the queen to fortify Walmer castle, located on the coast of Kent, and that of William Beecher, who wanted Cecil to intercede with Sir Thomas Sherley to pay the merchants who were keeping their eyes and ears open at Rouen for any information regarding the Spanish fleet.<sup>73</sup>

Cecil had received little intelligence regarding the 1597 armada; there were some reports about gatherings of ships in the port of Ferrol, but as to their size and their likely destination, he could only speculate. For example, the most useful and accurate intelligence that he received prior to the 1597 armada was that from Sir Horatio Palavicino. Palavicino had since the late 1570s been acting as the English government's financial agent in the Low Countries. Originally from Genoa, his family had made their wealth by trading alum especially to the Dutch; however, in 1578, the Dutch had been unable to pay their debts, and therefore Elizabeth had

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<sup>70</sup> Wernham, *Return of the Armadas*, pp. 175-76.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 177-78.

<sup>72</sup> Notes [by Lord Burghley] of proceedings to be taken to prevent an invasion, October 1597, SP 12/264 f.237r.

<sup>73</sup> Cobham to Cecil, 31 October 1597, SP 12/264 f.232r-v; William Beecher to Cecil October 1597, SP 12/264 f.235r.

stepped in to shore up her allies' finances, thereby bringing Palavicino into contact with senior English officials. Throughout the 1580s and early 1590s he became an important diplomat and agent in English foreign policy, striking a working relationship between Burghley and Walsingham by passing them intelligence, most importantly on the 1588 armada preparations.<sup>74</sup>

Naturally, through his dealings with Burghley, Palavicino came into contact with Cecil. The two had much in common; both were interested in importing and exporting English goods and Cecil often asked for Palavicino's advice on what goods to invest in or to transport. Cecil's fluency in Italian also aided in creating a close friendship.<sup>75</sup> By far the most important role that Palavicino played in Cecil's life was that of an intelligencer. He had been handling and corresponding with agents as far back as 1580 when he had worked under Walsingham, transmitting money to, and information from, English agents in Paris and the Low Countries. On Walsingham's death he continued to provide intelligence reports to Burghley, especially the reports from Chasteau-Martin and Edward James, based in Rochelle and Saint-Jean-de-Luz.<sup>76</sup> Thus it was to Palavicino that Cecil turned to help him to construct his intelligence network and to recommend reliable agents.

In April 1597, Palavicino told Cecil that he heard from his sources in Genoa that the Spanish were levying troops from Lombardy and Naples to supplement the land forces that Padilla's fleet would carry. This was because 'many of the Spanish soldiers are infirm, and the greater part unwilling to embark; whereby they may easily waste the coming summer. None the less the King means not only to maintain but also to increase the armada'.<sup>77</sup> On 30 May, Palavicino reported that the Spanish were collecting men to defend their coastlines from an attack by Essex's fleet and that the Spanish king intended to send out a fleet of his own from Ferrol to meet them in battle. He also reported how Spanish troops and their Neapolitan mercenaries

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<sup>74</sup> Lawrence Stone, *An Elizabethan: Sir Horatio Palavicino* (London, 1956), pp. 3-5.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, pp.187-190.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p. 239.

<sup>77</sup> Palavicino to Cecil, 19 April 1597, *HMCS*, 1597, vol. 7, pp. 164-65.

stationed in Namur, Belgium, were near mutiny due to not receiving their pay.<sup>78</sup> This meant that Cecil had been given some indication of a fleet being gathered and that additional troops were being levied, men that could be used to assist in a seaborne invasion of England. For some reason he chose to do nothing with this information, but in Cecil's defence he could not be sure that this fleet was intended for an attack on England. One possible explanation for this inactivity could have been that between the 1596 and the 1597 armadas, Cecil was preoccupied with trying to recruit more agents into his intelligence-gathering network. He did not, it seems, manage to add any additional agents to those he already had operating in Spain. He had to rely upon the likes of Giles van Harwick (whose real name was William Resolde), Thomas Honiman, Henry Lok and Edmund Palmer (the last two proved not to be very helpful at all).<sup>79</sup>

It seems that he had ignored Palavicino as, back in January 1597, Palavicino had argued that Cecil had too few agents in Spain and Portugal. 'I wish that, besides Teobast [Paul Theobaste], you had one or two others in Galitia because it is important to know the designs of that armada'.<sup>80</sup> Despite this warning, Cecil did nothing, continuing to maintain just his two agents that he already had in the area, Harwick and Theobaste. As the unpleasant surprise of the 1597 armada had shown, this proved to be a major mistake, especially given that he had received Palavicino's letter in January, giving him ample time to recruit new agents in and around Lisbon before the armada set sail in October.

To compound this mistake, the new principal secretary had even received an offer of service, in 1596, from a former Walsingham agent, Garrett de Malynes. Malynes told Cecil that he had been asked by Henry Brooke, eldest son of Lord Cobham, 'to continue with those men that Mr. Secretary [Walsingham] did use and partly to maintain in Spain, wherein I have somewhat

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<sup>78</sup> Palavicino to Cecil, 30 May 1597, *HMCS*, 1597, vol. 7, p. 224.

<sup>79</sup> These men are discussed in more detail below.

<sup>80</sup> Palavicino to Cecil, 14 January 1597, *HMCS*, 1597, vol. 7, p. 21. Paul Theobaste (or Teobast) had been living in London acting as a small scale merchant and factor for Middleburg and Amsterdam merchants as early as 1586. This is where he had come into contact with Palavicino. In 1597 he was charged by Cecil to travel Lisbon to spy on Spanish naval preparations. He remained there between April 1597 until February 1598. See Stone, *Palavicino*, pp. 255-54, esp. note 4 of p. 255.

continued according to the occasions and as circumstances did require'.<sup>81</sup> Here, it seemed, was an individual ideally placed within the court of Brussels, with established Spanish contacts of his own, ready for Cecil to exploit. What Malynes needed was the money and the means to forward the information he could gather to Cecil's desk. The fact that Malynes also mentioned Henry Brooke as one of his former employers demonstrates that figures within the regime had their own sources of intelligence and were at times active in recruiting agents. Gaining a good pool of intelligence sources would have been useful for someone in Brooke's position as he was a major political magnate in Kent, with its potential to be a landing site for any future armada and its close proximity to the channel. However, for some reason Cecil apparently chose not to follow up this offer as there is no further correspondence with Malynes in the State Papers or Cecil papers. Perhaps Cecil believed Malynes's offer was too good to be true, or one of his secretaries decided to dismiss the offer before it came to his master's attention. Then again, surely with the likelihood of another armada being sent against England, all avenues to secure accurate intelligence should have been followed through.

When Cecil had received intelligence about the armada, the fleet had already been destroyed by the storms of 18 October. Even one of his most frequent and reliable agents, the merchant Thomas Honiman, had failed to give him warning, albeit only just. Writing in December Honiman said that he had missed Cecil when Honiman had been at court on 24 November, but was now passing on the intelligence he would have given in person. Honiman now told of how:

The army of K[ing] P[hilip] aryved neare the coast of Inland & beinge ordering [sic] how to disimbarke ther men ... then [came] such a storme [occurred] that they were forced back agayn & as yet want of ther company 14 great shippes & 28 smale bareks, on[e] especiall galyon named Santiago was lost upon this

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<sup>81</sup> Garrett de Malynes to Cecil 14 July 1596, *HMCS*, 1596, vol. 6, pp. 262-63.

coast ... w[i]th 800 men & fifty thousand ducats. The rest are aryved to Ferroll ... the want of ther men ... be above tow thousand.<sup>82</sup>

Honiman stated that the Spanish 'gave out ther viage [voyage] was for Ireland, [but] ther greatest desire was for Ingland ... at ther return to Ferroll they gave out very publikly that they had bought Plymouth for 50000 crowns',<sup>83</sup> possibly to boost morale at home or to try to salvage some achievement from another failed armada.

Possibly knowing that his intelligence may have been too late, Honiman added in a postscript that he had managed to subvert a man to send to Ferrol to spy on the port, detailing to Cecil the man's credentials.

I hope [he] wilbe serviceable. He is an Irishman & hath ben in dyverse places in Spayn by way of trafficke, he speaketh the Sp[anish] tongue sufficient for the purpose ... as yet ther is no conveyance for him. It were very requisit to place on[e] in Ferroll, to have correspondence w[i]th him in Bayon [Bayonne]. I would wish him [the Irishman] [to] passe that way to be acquaynted w[i]th these messengers w[hi]ch shalbe sent him fro[m] tyme to tyme for his dispatches.<sup>84</sup>

Unfortunately, the name of this Irishman or his background is not given. He may have been another merchant factor who could move about the Spanish coastline with more ease than an English merchant like Honiman, especially since the Irish were rebelling against Elizabethan rule and that there were Irish soldiers fighting in defected Elizabethan regiments, such as Sir William Stanley's. Nevertheless, it is another example of a merchant contact offering Cecil a means to increase his surveillance of the Spanish coast line and it appears, from the absence of any future mention within the sources, that Cecil had once again chosen not to pursue this potential addition to his Spanish based contacts.

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<sup>82</sup> Thomas Honiman to Cecil, 8 December 1597, SP 12/265 f.77 r-v.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, SP 12/265 f.77r.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, SP 12/265/ f.77v.

Although the Honiman letter did not arrive in time, some of the information that Cecil did receive was fairly accurate. Writing from Lisbon, Giles van Harwick wrote to Peter Artzon (an alias of Cecil's) about news he had gleaned from a contact called Baynes in Ferrol. He reported that 'A Spanish fleet of 100 vessels, with 9,000 soldiers, sailed on 10 Oct., under the Adelantado, but he returned in 10 days with only 40. They had met with a great storm on the English coast, and were much spoiled'. Although he had the departure date wrong by a day, the number of troops given were correct and number of a hundred ships was only 36 less than the actual number. Harwick also gave something close to an accurate identification of the intended targets of the armada, reporting that they intended to land at Plymouth or Falmouth.<sup>85</sup> Given that these places were actually the targets that the Adelantado and Philip II had agreed upon, at least one of Cecil's agents in the Iberian peninsula was proving his worth. If this information had reached Cecil a few weeks earlier, it would have been extremely useful. The problem of how to communicate information back to London quickly and safely remained very difficult.

### Conclusion

The events of 1595 to 1597 had been a series of successes and failures for Sir Robert Cecil and belies the view that his career always took an upward curve. Through proving his capabilities to Elizabeth through his early years at court and as a privy councillor, he had built up a rapport with the queen due to the number of times he was in attendance on her. Although he was in a position of influence, as Paul Hammer and Pauline Croft have stated, he was far from secure as he had to establish himself in his new office and make himself indispensable to the queen before his ageing father died.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, he had a powerful rival in the Earl of Essex; Cecil may have known that his appointment as principal secretary served partly as

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<sup>85</sup> Harwick to Cecil, 10/20 November 1597, *CSPD*, 1595-97, vol. 265, pp. 529-30.

<sup>86</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan politics*, pp. 368-70; Croft, 'Can a Bureaucrat be a favourite?', pp. 81-84.



a counterweight to Essex so that no one person should dominate the court, a tactic Elizabeth had used effectively throughout her reign.

In terms of how his intelligence networks had fared during 1595-97, the answer would broadly have to be that they failed. Despite being warned by the likes of Palavicino to increase the number of agents that he had in Spain and Portugal, Cecil did nothing. This almost had disastrous consequences and it was only the luck of the weather forcing both armadas to turn back that arguably saved not just England, but Cecil's position as well. Over the next few years, as we will see, Cecil greatly expanded the number of agents he employed and chose to implement Walsingham's policy of placing agents in key ports and cities within Habsburg spheres of influence. This was a distinct change from his father's policy, which had been to cut back on the number of agents. The problem that Cecil had during 1595-97 was that he could not implement his new intelligence-gathering policy quickly enough to counter the threats of the armadas, certainly not until he had gained the principal secretaryship. It was now clear that the Spanish were, more than at any time before the 1588, invested in their desire to knock England out of the war. The question remained as to whether the intelligence network that Cecil had started to create would provide sufficient warning of any future armada attempts.

## Chapter 5: The fear of the Invisible Armada 1599

With the likelihood of an armada seemingly averted for the time being after 1596 and 1597, there was, nonetheless a continued atmosphere of tension and suspicion within the privy council that the Spanish could try another such attempt. For Cecil, the year 1598 and the early months of 1599 involved a period of consolidation and attempts to increase the scope of his intelligence networks, as well as dealing with all the duties of the principal secretary. This sense of anxiety only deepened when Essex was made lord lieutenant of Ireland; he arrived in Dublin on 14 April 1599, with a sizeable army, leaving England with a shortage of trained soldiers to defend its southern coasts.<sup>1</sup> It was in this context, during July and August 1599, that the regime mounted a major national mobilisation to defend the country against an expected Spanish attack which never materialised. Cecil, as one of the leading members of the privy council, was criticised for this expensive and humiliating incident as it appeared to be a major failure of his intelligence: indeed, one of the most public failures of his entire career. This chapter will explore how this happened and what it can tell us about Cecil's intelligence network.<sup>2</sup>

Firstly, the chapter explores the background of events leading up to the 'invisible' armada to give context to the decisions that were made during the summer of 1599. It would have been reasonable for Cecil to assume that another armada may be launched against England during 1598 and not in 1599. In fact, 1598 saw several significant events in the war between England and Spain. This started with the treaty of Vervins, signed in May 1598, whereby a peace was agreed between France and Spain. Cecil was sent on an embassy on 18 February 1598, to both reassure the Dutch of England's commitment to their cause and also to dissuade Henry IV from ceasing hostilities with Spain. In August came the news of his father's death, which came as a great personal blow to himself but also deprived the privy council of one its most

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<sup>1</sup> Wernham, *Return of the Armadas*, pp. 283-289; Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, pp. 308-309.

<sup>2</sup> A full analysis of Cecil's intelligence network can be found in chapter 7.

experienced politicians and planners. Another death followed the following month, when Philip II himself died and was succeeded by his son Philip III.<sup>3</sup> In the wake of this, Spain needed some time to reorganise and reorient itself to facilitate the wishes of a new monarch. Therefore, the prospect of a Spanish incursion against the British Isles looked very slim, and with Cecil's attention focused elsewhere, the need to gather intelligence on Spanish fleet movements took on a lesser urgency.

There has been little scholarly attention paid to the events surrounding the 'invisible armada' and the important and valuable role that intelligence reports played in shaping Cecil's, or any other privy councillor's, response to a crisis. In his account of the episode, R.B. Wernham simply stated that Cecil received intelligence from his agents, but does not go into any detail around what they said and the significance that these reports may have had on Cecil's decision-making during the summer.<sup>4</sup> He does, however, note that the flow of intelligence at this point was problematic, because 'all shipping in Spanish or Portuguese harbours was embargoed and that because of the plague movement by land was much restricted'.<sup>5</sup> Pauline Croft has also dismissed the role played by Cecil's agents. She did correctly claim that there 'was never a "mole" with accurate information about ... the Spanish council of state or council of war', but to suggest that the best that Cecil and the privy council could do was use 'guesswork' ignores the fact that these intelligence reports were the only way in which Cecil could obtain any indication about possible armadas.<sup>6</sup> Paul Hammer, in one respect, is correct when he asserts, when looking into Essex's intelligence networks, that agents did not report on 'top secret information, but news on current affairs – the coming and goings of important men, rumours of war or new taxes, and the reports of great events in other lands'.<sup>7</sup> But that does not mean that this sort of information could not be useful for someone in Cecil's position.

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<sup>3</sup> Paul C Allen, *Phillip III and the Pax Hispanica, 1598-1621: The Failure of Grand Strategy* (London, 2000), esp. pp. 15-19; Alford; *Burghley*, pp. 324-331; Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, pp. 286-89, 298-303.

<sup>4</sup> Wernham, *Return of the Armadas*, pp. 263-72.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>6</sup> Pauline Croft, "'The State of the World is Marvellously Changed'": England, Spain and Europe 1558-1604', in Susan Doran and Glenn Richardson (eds), *Tudor England and its Neighbours* (Basingstoke, 2005) pp. 196-8.

<sup>7</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, p. 185.

Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that without regular reports from agents such as Giles van Harwick, Cecil would have had no insight into potential Spanish intentions or military resources. In fact, it can be argued that previous historians have not looked at this episode closely enough, as it can tell us a lot about the effectiveness of Cecil's intelligence network three years after officially taking on Walsingham's role as principal secretary, and it can help explain how and why Cecil decided to go ahead with a full-scale military mobilisation to defend the country against the supposed attack. These intelligence reports will be discussed in the next part of the chapter.

The invisible armada also shows how other privy councillors, governors and lords lieutenant had their own intelligence sources, which at times made it hard for Cecil to set the agenda, especially on a topic as serious and easily inflamed as invasion rumours. The 1599 armada scare also gives us an insight into how Cecil himself thought about the intelligence that he received and how this could have impacted his subsequent actions during the summer. Furthermore, it validates the historical shift in perspective in recent years; whereas earlier historians have argued that Elizabethan military mobilisation plans were haphazard and last minute, they were in fact well thought out and made the most out of the resources that were available.<sup>8</sup> An analysis of the musters of 1599 compared to that of 1588 shows many similarities in its organisation, the strategies used for home defence, and the improvements implemented over the intervening war years.

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<sup>8</sup> John Nolan, 'The Muster of 1588', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal concerned with British Studies*, vol. 23, no. 3 (Autumn, 1991), pp. 387-407; Wernham, *Return of the Armadas*, pp. 263-272; Neil Younger, *War and Politics in the Elizabethan Counties* (Manchester, 2012); Neil Younger, 'The Practice and Politics of Troop-Raising: Robert Devereux, Second Earl of Essex and the Elizabethan Regime', *EHR*, vol. 127, no. 526 (June 2012), pp. 566-591.

### The background to the 'invisible' armada

Spanish foreign policy during the last months of Philip II's reign had been one of seeking peace and reconciliation with its three principal enemies: the French, the Dutch and the English. This policy led to the signing of the Treaty of Vervins, on 22 August 1598, which brought an end to open hostilities between Spain and France. As Paul Allen and Alexandra Gajda have shown, the treaty did not, however, lead to peace with England, which was only finally negotiated in the Treaty of London in 1604; the Spanish also kept on fighting the Dutch. The Spanish had seen the Treaty of Vervins as a necessary and only temporary course of action, to allow time to reorganise their overstretched armies and resources. The English and the Dutch (despite a six-month window during which England, could have made peace with Spain) were forced to renegotiate their alliance on terms more favourable to England which moved some of the cost of financing the English troops in the Netherlands to the Dutch.<sup>9</sup>

The last influential decision by Philip II was to bestow the sovereignty of the territories in the Netherlands still loyal to Spain to his eldest daughter Isabella and her future husband the Cardinal-Archduke Albert, on 22 August 1598. This had the knock-on effect that any decision on Habsburg foreign policy which concerned Flanders (as they often did) had to be agreed by both the courts of Madrid and Brussels. Even though the new sovereigns of the Spanish Netherlands were reliant on Spanish financial and military support, the Archduke did not hesitate to defy Philip II and his successor Philip III on policy when he felt it was not in the best interests of his new state.<sup>10</sup>

In spite of these diplomatic and dynastic developments, the principal concern to the queen, Cecil and the rest of the privy council in 1598 and 1599 was whether the new king would follow his predecessor's peace policies or whether he would be more belligerent. As Patrick

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<sup>9</sup> Allen, *Pax Hispanica*, pp. 15-16; Alexandra Gajda, 'Debating War and Peace in Late Elizabethan England', *THJ*, vol. 52, no. 4 (December 2009), pp. 852-854, 856. For a detailed account of the negotiations surrounding the treaty see: Wallace T MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I War and Politics, 1588-1603* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 208-215; Wernham, *Return of the Armadas*, chapter 16.

<sup>10</sup> Allen, *Pax Hispanica*, pp. 18-19; Gajda, 'Debating war and peace', p. 857.

Williamson, Allen and Gajda have explained, the new king was eager to prosecute these wars to obtain the fame and glory that it had brought his predecessors.<sup>11</sup> To this end, his first speech to his newly formed council of state announced that he expected the council to provide the necessary financial and military resources to carry on this religious war in the defence of the catholic faith. Furthermore, he quickly abolished the *Junta de noche*, which had been appointed by his father to oversee his son's government, and appointed his own councillors, most notably Francisco Gomez de Sandoval y Rojas, Marquis of Denia (later the Duke of Lerma). Philip III also put more emphasis on the council of war by appointing distinguished military commanders and ensuring that it met much more frequently than the council of state had during his father's reign. This aggressive rhetoric was backed up by action, as within two months into his reign the new king had decided to impose a comprehensive trade embargo on the rebel Dutch provinces in a bid to force them into submission, a reversal of the policy that had been in place since 1590.<sup>12</sup>

This act made English commentators nervous. Sir Thomas Edmondes, the English ambassador in Paris, wrote to Sir Robert Sidney on 12 December 1598, insisting that 'the late arrests, by the young King of Spain, of ships of the Low Countries, breeds an opinion that he means some enterprise against us'.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, Sir William Brown, also writing to Sidney, mentioned the arrests in Spain, with 'merchants and mariners imprisoned and cruelly dealt with. They write from Antwerp of 15 or 16 thousands soldiers that were to come to Farol, and say plainly that they are bound for Ireland'.<sup>14</sup> Cecil would have been aware of these developments through the dispatches that he received from his agents and ambassadors. He would have been worried by the report sent by Edmondes that detailed the arrests of Dutch shipping and the mindset of the new Spanish king 'for having chosen into his council many of

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<sup>11</sup> Patrick Williamson, 'Philip III and the Restoration of the Spanish Government, 1598-1603', *EHR*, vol. 88, no. 349 (October, 1973), pp. 756-57; Allen, *Pax Hispanica*, pp. 18-21; Gajda, 'Debating War and Peace', pp. 858-59.

<sup>12</sup> Allen, *Pax Hispanica*, p. 21.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Kingsford and William Shaw, (eds.), *HMC De L'Isle and Dudley*, vol. 2 (London, 1934-42), p. 357.

<sup>14</sup> *HMC De L'Isle and Dudley*, vol. 2, p. 358.

the nobility and men of war, it is thought that his actions will correspond to war, desiring, as it is said, to honour his first beginning with some great action, and rather to take away the opinion which hath been always conceived of his disability and weakness'.<sup>15</sup> Even Cecil's long standing friend Sir Horatio Palavicino had warned him in December 1598 of a new, more aggressive Spain, arguing that he and the privy council should be careful of sending all the experienced soldiers with Essex to Ireland, lest they should leave themselves unprotected if another armada were to be launched. Palavicino ended his letter by endorsing Edmond's view of Philip III: 'The young King appears to be acquiring with his kingdom all the vindictiveness and obstinacy of his father'.<sup>16</sup>

### The unresolved problem of Ireland

Palavicino was right to worry about sending troops to Ireland. By the end of 1598 and the beginning of 1599, events in Ireland were quickly spiralling out of control. During Elizabeth's reign there had been increasing attempts to force Ireland to pay taxes and to submit to the English government. To do this they had to try to eradicate the Gaelic institution of lordship and military power which underpinned Irish chieftains such as Hugh O'Neill, as well as the catholic religion which was still very much practised by the native Irish.<sup>17</sup> To do this the Tudors established English free-holders to undermine the Gaelic lords as a social class and gave administrative duties to provincial presidents and out of the hands of the native Irishmen.<sup>18</sup> Naturally this could only lead to friction, resentment and then outright rebellion. Indeed, small scale rebellions did happen, but the main insurgency came in 1594, starting off what was to be known as the Nine Years War.

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<sup>15</sup> [Thomas Edmond's to Cecil], 12 December 1598, *HMCS*, 1598, vol. 8, 1598, pp. 489-492.

<sup>16</sup> Palavicino to Cecil, 11 December 1598, *HMCS*, 1598, vol. 8, 1598, p. 488.

<sup>17</sup> Hiram Morgan, *Tyrone's Rebellion and the Outbreak of the Nine Years War in Tudor Ireland* (Bury St Edmunds, 1993), esp. pp. 215-221; Hiram Morgan, 'Hugh O'Neill and the Nine Years War in Tudor Ireland', *THJ*, vol. 36, no.1 (March, 1993), pp. 21-37; Richard Bagwell, *Ireland under the Tudors* (3 vols, London, 1885-1890), esp. vol. 3, and James O'Neill, *The Nine Years War, 1593-1603: O'Neill, Mountjoy and the Military Revolution* (Dublin, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Morgan, *Tyrone's Rebellion*, p. 219.

The main worry for the English was that the Catholic Irish Confederacy (as they called themselves) would seek support from Spain, thus allowing Spain to gain a foothold in Ireland to launch attacks on England itself. Certainly, Philip II and Philip III did send weapons, supplies and even troops to aid the rebels, but the aid was never large enough to allow the Irish to achieve total victory.<sup>19</sup> In the years leading up to 1599, the English suffered military defeats due to the weakening of leadership at the top of its command structure, most notably the removal of Sir William Russell in January 1597 and his replacement by Thomas Burgh. However, Burgh himself did not last long, dying on 13 October, which left English plans for 1597 at an end. In 1598 things went from bad to worse for the English forces, culminating in the disastrous defeat of Sir Henry Bagenal's troops at the hands of Tyrone at the battle of Yellow Ford on 14 August 1598. Bagenal lost 800 English troops and another 400 were wounded and 300 deserted. This left Essex as the natural choice to succeed to the lord lieutenancy and, with Cecil's help, he took the largest army that the Elizabethan regime had ever sent abroad with 16,000 foot and 1,300 cavalry.<sup>20</sup> However, sending such a strong force to Ireland would naturally leave few trained soldiers for home defence. If the Spanish were to attempt another armada, the bulk of the nation's defence would rest on the Trained Bands and militia which would have to be called up. With a new, young and aggressive Spanish monarch, concerns over the Infanta's claim to the English succession and the stripping of soldiers to quell the rebellion in Ireland, Cecil would be right to feel that England had been left vulnerable to attack. It is important to consider these conflicting variables when considering Cecil's reaction to the 'invisible' armada in the summer of 1599.

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<sup>19</sup> For examples of Spanish sending aid to Ireland in 1598 and 1599 see, *CSP Ire*, 1598-1599 vols. 202-03, pp. 173-74, 334-35; 480-81; for the Spanish policy on Ireland see, Allen, *Pax Hispanica*, pp. 48, 60, 80, 92-100.

<sup>20</sup> Sir Geoffrey Fenton to Cecil, 24 July 1598, *CSP Ire*, 1598-1599, vol. 202, p. 212.



### Cecil's intelligence reports

In the months leading up to the order to mobilise on 22 July 1599, Cecil received numerous intelligence reports from his agents in Spain, informing him that the likelihood of any armadas being sent against England were slim. Cecil's agents in Spain and Portugal were Giles Van Harwick, Henry Lok and Francis Lombard. Harwick reported from Lisbon, whilst both Lok and Palmer operated from the Bay of Biscay, residing intermittently between Bilbao and Bayonne.<sup>21</sup>

The first report to reach Cecil came on 15 January from Giles van Harwick, giving an indication of the state of the soldiers and ships that were stationed around Lisbon, Cadiz, Ferrol and the region of Andalusia. The letter described ships in great need of repair, especially in Cadiz and Ferrol, where the 'forces are disparsid and a part of them is also sent for britanye. So that this yere the Kinge will not offend lubeck [deciphered as England]'.<sup>22</sup> Brittany was the former powerful duchy that had now been subsumed into France. Despite the French and the Spanish being at peace, Henry IV would not allow Spanish ships to anchor in French ports, although Harwick may not have known this.<sup>23</sup> The letter also told Cecil that Philip III was sending reinforcements to the Dutch theatre of war and not intending to gather forces to attack England, and that there was an air of mutiny amongst Italian troops stationed in Lisbon, of which only 450 out of a possible 5,000 men answered a recent call to muster. Without pay and mutinous, they had resorted to robbery and so, as Harwick stated, they were to be moved north to Ferrol.

The letters that Harwick had sent in February and April also described the state of the Spanish soldiers and ships. In February, he related that Padilla only had 10 galleys and 5,000 soldiers with him at Castile. At Ferrol and A Coruña, there were only twelve 'great ships' and seven transport ships and only three thousand soldiers making their way to Lisbon, to guard against

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<sup>21</sup> A memorial of Intelligencers in several places, some as resyidentes, some to goe and come with a note[?] of their qualities, their[?] entertaynmentes ordniarye and extraordiarye, by whose meanes they are payde and what and how their letters shalbe brought, in my absence and understoode when they come.'1598, SP 12/265 ff.204-206r-v.

<sup>22</sup> Harwick [William Resoulde] to Peter Arston [Cecil], 5/15 January 1599, SP 94/6 f.1r-v.

<sup>23</sup> Wernham, *Return of the Armadas*, pp. 258-59.

the Anglo-Dutch attack that the Spanish were sure was coming.<sup>24</sup> The report in April went into much more detail about the distribution of ships and men around the coastlines of Spain. He stated that the naval commander Padilla had sent 'four galleys from Lisbon to Sevil which will depart in 10 days' time from the date of the letter' (meaning that they should arrive on the 25 February). From Seville, Padilla was preparing a fleet of '20 ships of war and 40 gallies', which were to journey from Seville and arrive in Lisbon on 5 May. Padilla would also gather together about 20,000 soldiers, with a further ten galleons and three transport ships being contributed to the fleet. On paper this appeared to be a sizeable fleet, with the potential capacity to either raid England or land forces in Ireland, but Harwick confidently stated that these ships were only to be used to defend the Spanish coastline, and in his view the ships currently sitting in Ferrol and A Coruña were 'all out of preparations and no likelihood to be furnished forth this yere'.<sup>25</sup> The information in this letter seems more accurate than the February letter as it provides much more detail about ships numbers, locations and dates of departure and movement. This could indicate that Harwick had contacts within the ports of Ferrol, Seville and A Coruña or at the very least he must have questioned sailors or merchants who had passed through these places; unsurprisingly, Harwick did not give up his sources.

Harwick also reported, in his February letter, that there was an outbreak of plague in Lisbon and that all the 'riche cyttezens' had fled the city. Indeed, there had been an outbreak of plague around this time which ravaged a population already weakened by bad harvests; according to Geoffrey Parker, as many as 10 percent of the population succumbed, which severely limited Spain's capacity to invest in an invasion of England.<sup>26</sup> Harwick continuously stated in these letters that it was Spain who feared an attack from the English and Dutch in reprisal for the embargo that Phillip III had put on Dutch shipping at the beginning of his reign. So much so that Padilla had been:

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<sup>24</sup> Harwick to Cecil, 5/15 February 1599, SP 94/6 f.196r-v.

<sup>25</sup> Harwick to Cecil, 14/24 April 1599, SP 94/6 f.212r-v.

<sup>26</sup> Harwick to Cecil, 5/15 February 1599, SP 94/6 f.196r; Geoffrey Parker, *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* (London, 1998), pp. 279-80.

Preparing 20 shippes of war and 40 gallies to come hether [Lisbon] about the fith of maye, and reportid will bringe w[i]th him about 10 thousand spanishe soldiers, he hath undertaken w[i]th the kinge, to defend this countrie, and questionles by the next yere he will growe to great strengthe, and is lyke to be royally supported in all his procedinges.<sup>27</sup>

He then reported the governor of A Coruña had sent some small captured French ships to reconnoitre English harbours and that a Mr Spencer had recently returned from surveying the coast between Portsmouth and Southampton.<sup>28</sup> This surveillance of the English coast may have suggested to Cecil that the Spanish were thinking about launching a raid along the English south coast.

Harwick's reports can be corroborated with those of Henry Lok and Francis Lombard, although they wrote less often and less consistently. Lok only wrote regarding intelligence twice and Lombard only once; although it must be admitted that they sent their letters via Thomas Honiman, whose ships could have encountered difficulty making the crossing to England. Nevertheless, in May 1599, both Lok and Lombard were confident that the 'shipping in theas parts of Biscay beinge holy unmanned, unriged, unvictualed as yet not likely in seson, to be fit any thing, to us dangerus. And by advises I have fro[m] my [first] directions, it semeth that thay more fere the Flemish army and owrs then anything els'. Furthermore, Lok indicated that the Spanish would send 'thayr galis towards Civil [Seville] and St Lucar, where som shipping is preparing presently for the Indis. And Lishbone [Lisbon] is so mistrustful of us, and that many forces ar drawn (notwithstanding thair home was barrin [barren] and plage) fro[m] Biscay and Galicia thether'.<sup>29</sup>

These were not the only subjects that were being reported back to Cecil, as his agents were also informing him on the possibility of Spanish peace negotiations and on the tension

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<sup>27</sup> Harwick to Cecil, 24 April 1599, SP 94/6 f.212r-v.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, SP 94/6 ff. 212-213r-v.

<sup>29</sup> Henry Lok to Cecil, 8/18 May 1599, SP 94/6 f. 230r-v; Francis Lombard to Cecil, 20/30 May 1599, SP 94/6 ff.220-221r-v.

between certain members of the Spanish military leaders. For example, Harwick reported that Padilla was so angry with Archduke Albert because 'he is unwilling to submyt himself under the Adelantado [Padilla] who in seinge himself thus to be crossed is redie for Anger to teare the beard from his [Albert's] face'.<sup>30</sup> As has been discussed above, Philip II's decision to gift the sovereignty of the Spanish Netherlands to Isabella and Archduke Albert meant that any plans to invade England would have needed the support and coordination of the forces under Albert's control. The comment about Padilla tearing off the Archduke's beard has more the ring of rumour about it rather than actual intelligence, a reminder that these agents were not always 'professional' career spies, as, for example, Robert Poley had been for Burghley in the late 1580s and for Cecil in the early 1590s. Having said this, the word on the street could, at times, be useful to someone in Cecil's position, as rumours about the personalities of political leaders may contain an element of truth.

Furthermore, Harwick reported, there was even talk in Lisbon of peace with England and the Dutch, but he warned it would be very dangerous to seek peace now as it would be:

Verie dangerous for the English state and Low Countries, until he [Philip III] be further weakend, for that obtayninge peace, [as] he will in short tyme gather great treasure, and so growe stronge. Whereas at present he is pore, and cleare worne out of his forces for sea and land, and thus smal forces that are left, cleane diseorayed [disarrayed] and in miserie for want of paie, and in seinge what bad seasons hath bin in all his fathers former prosedinges, and therfore verie conv[i]enient will to kepe him under and necessarie this sum[m]er to visit his coast if further attempts against him be not intendid.<sup>31</sup>

There was a lot of truth in this statement; as the work of Paul Allen and Geoffrey Parker has shown, by the closing years of the 1590s, Spain was worn out both financially and militarily. Added together with the three failed armada attempts they would have found it difficult to

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<sup>30</sup> Harwick to Cecil, 9/19 May 1599, SP 94/6 f.222r-v.

<sup>31</sup> Harwick to Cecil, 14/24 April 1599, SP 94/6 f.212r-v.

commit the necessary resources that would be needed to invade England whilst simultaneously continuing the fight against the Dutch.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, English policy towards the Spanish was always one of mistrust.

#### The privy council's response to their intelligence reports

Throughout the early months of 1599, therefore, Cecil's agents had been telling him that Spain was being ravaged by plague, that its soldiers were mutinous, its ships few and in need of repair, and its commanders arguing amongst themselves, all of which suggested no attack was imminent that year. Why then did Cecil decide to endorse the mobilisation of the trained bands and militia in July? One of the reasons could have been that he was simply swept along by the amount of intelligence reports coming from the other members of the privy council, such as Henry Cobham, the lord warden of the Cinque ports.<sup>33</sup> On 31 July, Cobham received a report from Captain Matthew Bredgate, who had recently return from Brest, where he had heard through his contacts that the Spanish would be in sight of the English shore in a few days with 70 galleys, 100 ships and 30,000 soldiers.<sup>34</sup> These numbers were significantly more than those being reported by Harwick and, given that Bredgate had heard these numbers in Brest, it may be safely assumed that they were rumours and less reliable than Harwick's information from Lisbon, which was a more closer and reliable place to pick up information about fleet numbers.

There were also numerous reports coming in from the likes of Sir Ferdinando Gorges, lieutenant of the fort at Plymouth. Both he and Cobham obtained intelligence from Lieutenant Edward Dodington and Captain George Fane, who had been tasked with sending back reports

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<sup>32</sup> Allen, *Pax Hispanica*, pp. 25-26; Parker, *Grand Strategy*, chapter 10; Croft, 'The State of the World is Marvellously Changed', pp. 192-199.

<sup>33</sup> Lieutenant Edward Dodington to Sir Ferdinando Gorges, 26 July 1599, *CSPD*, 1598-1601, vol. 271, p. 261; William Earl of Bath to the Council, 29 July 1599, *Ibid*, p. 263, Captain George Fenner to Charles Howard, Earl of Nottingham, 30 July 1599, *Ibid*, p. 265, Henry Brooke, Lord Cobham, to Cecil, 31 July 1599, *Ibid*, p. 270.

<sup>34</sup> Captain Matthew Bredgate to Cobham, 31 July 1599, SP 12/271 f.217r.

of sightings of Spanish ships around Brest and the English channel.<sup>35</sup> His three letters to the privy council on 25 July neatly convey the anxiety and confusion caused by rumours of a supposedly imminent Spanish attack: 'There is a fleet at this instant coming in upon us ... in all likelihood it is the enemy'.<sup>36</sup> He was, in fact, mistaken as he quickly acknowledged in a hastily written letter sent the same day: 'The fleet that I advertised you of, as being discovered by a pinnace sent out on purpose, were Flemings, bound for Rochelle. The manner of their working caused us much to doubt them, whereof I through it my duty to give you the speediest notice I could; pardon my hasty writing'.<sup>37</sup> In the State Papers for the summer of 1599, there are numerous reports and letters from mayors, privy councillors, soldiers and their agents, all telling of the same gatherings of ships in Ferrol and the bay of Biscay, whose numbers varied by report. For example, on 19 July, the mayor of Plymouth, John Blytheman, wrote to Cecil and the privy council that a merchant had arrived from Morlaix in Brittany, who reported that the wife of the governor of Brest had told the merchant that a Spanish pinnace had arrived to ask for licence, so that 60 ships and 60 galleys could meet there to be used by the King of Spain.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, Sir Nicholas Parker wrote to the council from Pendennis Castle on 24 July, reporting that he had examined a merchant, who had recently arrived from Brest, who told him that he had heard, through two French merchants, that on 13 July seventy Spanish ships had set sail from Cape Finisterre, but that the merchants did not know where they were bound for.<sup>39</sup> There was also some disagreement amongst the government and the lord lieutenants as to where the intended armada would land in England. The lord admiral suggested either the Thames or Kent, whilst Sir Ferdinando Gorges was adamant that the fleet would look to strike at the Thames, and others that Milford Haven was in fact the target.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, it can

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<sup>35</sup> Dodington to Gorges, 26 July 1599, *CSPD*, 1598-1601, vol. 271, p. 261; Fane to Cobham, 28 July 1599, *Ibid*, p.263.

<sup>36</sup> Dodington to the Council, 25 July 1599, SP 12/271 f.184r.

<sup>37</sup> Dodington to the Council, 25 July 1599, SP 12/271 f.185r.

<sup>38</sup> John Blytheman to Cecil, 19 July 1599, SP 12/271 f.158r.

<sup>39</sup> Sir Nicholas Parker to the Council, 24 July 1599, *CSPD*, 1598-1601, vol. 271, pp. 255-56.

<sup>40</sup> Gorges to Cecil 3 August 1599, *CSPD*, 1598-1601, vol. 271, p. 275; Wernham, *After the Armada*, pp. 256-57.

be little surprise that Cecil, faced with the sheer volume of information, thought it prudent to sanction the mobilisation, even though his own intelligence from Spain suggested these reports were overly alarmist. This was despite the fact that Cecil had his own experienced agents in the Iberian peninsula, who had told him repeatedly that an armada was not going to be launched, but he chose to believe reports from these less reliable sources instead.

It is hard to tell whether Cecil truly believed in these reports from likes of Captain Bredgate and others. It is also hard to tell when exactly Cecil decided to disregard the intelligence from his own agents and to go along with the other members of the privy council into mobilising the country for invasion. What can be said for certain is that as Cecil was present at privy council meetings during July and August, he would have been aware of the mounting numbers of reports coming in telling of some form of Spanish attack along the south coast and that it would be likely to happen in the near future. The fact that a number of privy councillors (such as Cobham), lord lieutenants and fort commanders like Gorges and Parker, as well as the mayors of major south coastal cities and towns, were all in agreement that an invasion was imminent makes it even more unsurprising that Cecil decided to bend with the wind, as his own reports must have seemed like a lone voice against the majority of the established governmental elite.

In this regard, it is understandable why the queen and the majority of the privy council would have been more likely to follow a cautious policy. As in 1596 and 1597, the government was woefully unprepared for either of these armadas and it was only the unpredictable weather in the Atlantic and the English channel which had saved England from invasion. The privy council would not have known of Philip II's and his son Philip III's indecision. What must also be taken into account was the rivalry between Cecil and Essex which, by the summer of 1599, taken on a greater intensity. As Alexandra Gajda and Natalie Mears have identified, it was Burghley's death which removed any pretence of civility between the two men; Essex had respected Burghley, whereas he saw Cecil as beneath him.<sup>41</sup> Essex increasingly believed, in view of the

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<sup>41</sup> Alexandra Gajda, *The Earl of Essex and the late Elizabethan Political Culture* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 142-152; Natalie Mears, 'Regnum Cecilianum? A Cecilian Perspective of the Court', in John Guy (ed.), *The Reign of Elizabeth I: court and culture in the last decade* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 64.

string of appointments which Cecil and his allies had obtained between 1596 and 1599, that there was a Cecilian faction, made up of Cecil, Raleigh, Cobham and Buckhurst, which was arrayed against him.<sup>42</sup> For example, Cobham had been appointed lord chamberlain on 8 August 1596; in 1599 Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, had succeeded Burghley as lord treasurer; and Sir Thomas Egerton was made lord keeper of the privy seal and appointed to the privy council in May 1596, as well as keeping his title of master of the rolls.<sup>43</sup> In 1597 Cecil obtained the lucrative chancellorship of the duchy of Lancaster and in May 1599 he was made master of the court of wards, just as his father had been. This enabled him to control a vast patronage network in London and the counties, especially over the major landed families, thus entrenching his position and extending his political power at court.<sup>44</sup> Given this evidence, Essex must have felt justified in his fear as many of those who had ties to Essex were on the margins of power and influence, but this misses the main point in that Elizabeth thought that Buckhurst, Egerton and Cobham had the right blend of administrative experience and knowledge of the workings of government to fulfil these roles and Essex's preferred candidates simply did not. In spite of this, even whilst Essex was in Ireland during the summer of 1599, he loomed large in the minds of his fellow privy councillors. With Essex gone, the responsibility for organising home defence fell to Cecil, and he must have realised that if the reports of an armada were true and he chose to do nothing, his political standing and reputation would have been seriously damaged, allowing Essex and his supporters to regain the political initiative.

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<sup>42</sup> Gajda, *Elizabethan Political Culture*, pp. 143-45, 147, 151.

<sup>43</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan politics*, p. 370.

<sup>44</sup> Croft, 'Can a bureaucrat be a favourite?', pp. 83-4.



### Cecil's response to his intelligence reports

On 24 July, Harwick reported that there was a false rumour spreading in Lisbon that the queen was in ill health and likely to die.<sup>45</sup> This led to the Spanish council reconsidering their options regarding England. The Jesuit Father Creswell, who represented the seminary colleges within Spain, commented in a letter addressed to Parsons that some members on the Spanish council thought that it was treason to suggest that Philip III should help the English catholics, as the Spanish had already sent armadas and aid only to receive defeat and humiliation in return.<sup>46</sup> To strengthen the council's resolve, Creswell submitted a memorandum entitled 'The reasons why the English catholics request a decision', in which Creswell warned that James VI of Scotland was making good progress on his claim that he was going to convert to catholicism and that the English catholics needed clarity about whether Spain would support the Infanta's claim or not.<sup>47</sup> In the end, the Spanish council advised the King to wait on events for the moment, thank the catholics for their support and say that he would take the matter under advisement, whilst also keeping the pope informed of his plans. In order to pacify Creswell, the king and council did let it be known that any potential nominee for their support would have to be neither a heretic or English.<sup>48</sup> Cecil would not have known this, however, and therefore a catholic claimant backed by Spanish wealth and military might was always his greatest fear.

On 6 July 1599, Thomas Phelippes (who had been working for Cecil from April), writing to his cousin William, was one of the first recorded sources to mention Cecil and the privy council's 'fear of the Spaniard's coming'.<sup>49</sup> His suggestion that 'his Lordship may not altogether account it rash presumption' gives a hint that Cecil may have been starting to give credence to the

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<sup>45</sup> Harwick to Cecil 5/15 February 1599, SP 94/6 ff.192r-v, 213r-v.

<sup>46</sup> Allen, *Pax Hispanica*, pp. 25-26; Albert J Loomie, *The Spanish Elizabethans: The English Exiles at the Court of Philip II* (New York, 1963) p. 195.

<sup>47</sup> Loomie, 'Philip III and the Stuart Succession in England, 1600-1603', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, vol. 43, (1965) pp. 496-97.

<sup>48</sup> Allen, *Pax Hispanica*, p. 26.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Phelippes to Cecil, 14 April 1600, SP 12/274 f.180r; Same to the same, 18 April 1600, SP 12/274 f.185r; Thomas Phelippes to Cecil, 16 June 1600, SP 12/275 f.10r; Alford, *The Watchers*, pp. 295-297.

rumours.<sup>50</sup> Within the letter, Phelippes set down why he thought that the Spanish would not invade. He admitted the 'urgent necessity and the boiling heat of his [Philip's] youth and inclination, carried into this violent course of arming both at sea and land' and his supposed desire to restore Spain back to its previous dominance. However, Phelippes went on to counter his cousin's suggestion that a number of ships were stationed around A Coruña and that the archduke was moving his forces to meet the ships coming by sea with the assertion that there had been ships stationed around Flanders for a number of months, as there always were at that time of year. Furthermore, the ships may have been simply bringing correspondence for the infanta or supplies for some action in the Low Countries, as after all the archduke was inclined towards peace.<sup>51</sup>

Phelippes was adamant that since the Spanish could not trust the French King to provide safe harbour for their ships and that there had been no letters intercepted from Spain about England, an invasion did not appear likely: 'If they come near London, they would invade us with a just force, but as the case stands, they cannot spare all their power'. Therefore it was more likely that they would look to lay siege to either Ostend or another cautionary town, so it would be more prudent to keep watch there.<sup>52</sup> During the same month other reports were being delivered to the privy council informing them that the Spanish were intending to land at Brest on 25 July; even Thomas Honiman, after spending twenty-seven days in Bayonne, thought that the Spanish fleet was likely to go for Brest.<sup>53</sup> These reports do suggest that there was a fleet gathering, but that this was a routine measure commissioned by the Spanish war council, and Padilla had been instructed to raise a fleet either for defence, patrolling the Atlantic to protect Spanish shipping, or for sending reinforcements to the Low Countries. An attack on English shores was not mentioned.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Thomas Phelippes to William Phelippes, 6 July 1599, SP 12/271 f. 138r.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, SP 12/271 f.138v.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, SP 12/271 f.138v.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Honiman to Cecil, [14?] July 1599, *CSPD*, 1598-1603, vol. 271, p. 246; for reports citing the Spanish were going to land at Brest see, *CSPD*, 1598-1603, vol. 271, pp. 247-250.

<sup>54</sup> Croft, 'The State of the World is Marvellously Changed', pp. 197-98; Allen, *Pax Hispanica*, p. 27.

We can get Cecil's own views on the intelligence that he received and on the reports delivered by other privy councillors, lord lieutenants and mayors, from his letters to Sir Henry Neville, the English ambassador in Paris and Cecil's cousin. In one letter, dated 17 August, he gave Neville an update on the state of England's defences. By this time, the navy had been assembled in the west and off the coast of Kent to counter any likely Spanish landing sites.<sup>55</sup> Cecil then gave his opinion that:

The reports from France, by the Governors of Deipe and of Calais ... have bin such, as gave no small cause for us to apprehend some Invasion from Spaine ... These Things I do tell you gave us this Alarm, being these Reports, (whereof I send you herein the Abstract) that you may see with what a Whirlwind they were brought hiether; though for my part, it was ever to me a Paradox, that the Fleet was in Brest; and yet all Circumstances considered of my place and Fortune, I did choose rather to run with the Streame of Providence, then of too much Confidence upon myne own Intelligences, which I must confess did assure me of Preparations all the Year, for the defence against the States Fleet; of which I did ever think the Enemy would make some use, so soon as he should be secure of them upon his owne Coasts.<sup>56</sup>

Therefore, Cecil believed his hand was forced into ordering the musters, even though he believed in his own intelligence that the Spanish were more worried about the Dutch attacking their coastlines. He also had come to the same conclusion as Thomas Phelippes that an attack coming from the direction of Brest was unlikely due to the French not giving Spanish ships permission to anchor there, but he could never be certain. In this sense, for Cecil to order the

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<sup>55</sup>Cecil to Sir Henry Neville, 17 August 1599, cited in, Sir Ralph Winwood, *Memorials of the Affairs of State in the Reigns of Elizabeth and King James I*, vol. 1 (London, 1725), pp. 90-92.

<sup>56</sup> The fear that the Spanish would use Brest as a staging post to attack England came from the French and Spanish signing the treaty of Vervins, which allowed trade to resume between the two countries. In reality Henry IV was reluctant to allow the Spanish ships to use his ports. Another possible explanation can come from back in 1594 when the Spanish fighting in Brittany wanted to capture Brest, which was then held by the English. See Hammer, *Elizabeth's wars*, pp. 181-82, Allen, *Pax Hispanica*, p. 15-16; Cecil to Sir Henry Neville, 17 August 1599, cited in Winwood, *Memorials*, vol.1, p. 90.

muster in the event of a false armada was the lesser of two evils. He would still be blamed but it would be a setback that he could bear. If there was an actual armada and he did nothing then the political fallout for him would have been severe, as he could not only lose his position but also his life. Furthermore, it was very plausible that Essex and his supporters would have construed his inaction as mountable to treason. Seen in this light, it is perhaps unfair for Pauline Croft to say that he 'over-reacted out of excessive caution', given the potentially dangerous and delicate political stakes that he was involved in at the time.<sup>57</sup>

It was also during this time that Cecil wanted to recruit more agents within Spain and to this end he asked Sir Henry Neville to 'enquire that Poynt of the Galleys being already at Groyne [A Coruña], as much as you can' to clarify the intelligence that he had received from Spain. Furthermore, with France and Spain being at peace he would appreciate it if Neville could 'learne of any Frechman of good Understanding and Conscience not to betray me, that will take upon him to go into Spayne, and live there for a year, to advertise me of all things'. And he ensured that he would give the agents 'large Entertaynment and you shall do a thinge of very great Importance'.<sup>58</sup> In other words, Cecil's believed his intelligence network in Spain needed improving as only Harwick managed to provide any meaningful reports; Cecil's view must have been, justifiably, that the more agents he had in Spain the more likely he was to get a better idea of the enemy's intentions. By seeking to recruit a Frenchman, Neville's recruit could move in circles that were closed to Cecil's English agents.

Frustratingly the only further reference to the recruiting of this potential French agent is given in Neville's reply 'I have already used some meanes to fynd out suche a one as your Honour devised to imploy into Spaine, and am in some hope to hear of one very shortly'.<sup>59</sup> There is, however, an insight into the queen's view on her policy towards gathering intelligence, in a

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<sup>57</sup> Croft, 'The State of the World is Marvellously Changed', p. 197.

<sup>58</sup> Cecil to Sir Henry Neville, 17 August 1599, cited in Winwood, *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 91.

<sup>59</sup> Sir Henry Neville to Cecil, 26 August 1599, cited in *Ibid*, pp. 94-95.

conversation that Cecil recounts in another letter to Neville, on the subject of gaining an allowance for Neville to use in employing potential agents:

I have dealt with the Queen in it [the matter of gaining an allowance], for in my Father's tyme the Queen was angry about an allowance made to Sir Antony Mildmay, though truly he was very moderate. Now her Majestie used only to me this Answere, that though in former tymes when the Scottish Queene lived, Mr. Stafford had some extraordinary Bills, because the League was then on foot, and France was full of Practices against her, and the tyme was since in Mr Unton's tyme miserable, till the Peace was made: Yet all things being now quiet, and much to be learned without great Payments, her Majestie seemed to intend a straight Hand, and used these words *That there was difference between writing Res Gestas* [the exploits] and Intelligences.<sup>60</sup>

By the time Cecil had sent this letter, the queen had already given authorisation for the land army to stand down in a piecemeal fashion from 17 to 20 August, as the reconnaissance ships the navy had sent out from Southampton and Plymouth could find no trace of an armada in the Bay of Biscay or near Brest. It had been costly exercise, with the government having to pay for troops and all the victuals, which reached £10,000 for those raised in Devon alone and there were various other expenses that had to be met.<sup>61</sup> Padilla's armada had in fact set out for the Azores to intercept the Dutch fleet trying to capture the treasure ships from the New World.<sup>62</sup> There had never been an armada specifically put together with the task of raiding or invading England. Cecil's intelligence had been proved right and the overly alarmist reports of the other political elite had been proved false.

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<sup>60</sup> Cecil to Sir Henry Neville, 28 August 1599, cited in Ibid, pp. 97-98.

<sup>61</sup> Wernham, *Return of the Armadas*, p. 269; for the expense incurred for the payment of troops see *HMC Foljambe*, f.241, pp. 97-98.

<sup>62</sup> Wernham, *Return of the Armadas*, pp. 262-63.

### Comparison of the mobilisation of 1588 and 1599

Despite the expense of raising the land army and organising the navy, the 1599 muster demonstrated that the Elizabethan government could quickly and effectively mobilise a substantial body of men and materials to repel what they thought was an imminent invasion. This was because, according to Paul Hammer, the Elizabethan government were determined not to be caught cold as they had in the previous armada scares in 1596 and 1597; arguably they were more prepared to resist the invisible armada than the grand armada of 1588. In fact, there are many similarities between the muster of 1588 and that of 1599, which is not surprising given that 1599 was the first time since the grand armada that the government had ordered such a general mobilisation of men and material. But what must also be taken into consideration are the different circumstances that faced the privy councillors in 1588 to their successors in 1599. In the intervening eleven years, England had been on a war footing and therefore they knew that the privy councillors were likely at some point to be targeted for attack by Spain.<sup>63</sup> John Nolan has overturned the general misconception that earlier historians have held that England was unprepared for invasion in 1588. In his view the 'Great Muster' should be viewed as 'an administrative feat of massive scope that involved months of preparation, extensive military training, and precise timing'.<sup>64</sup> More recently, Neil Younger has highlighted that, while the Elizabethan state had no standing army, it relied on the lord lieutenants to provide the men and victuals to create any such army. This had both the advantages of shifting the costs on to the counties through local taxation and the disadvantages of each county working in different ways.<sup>65</sup> I would agree with both of the historians above that the traditional story of a haphazard and uncoordinated response to the Spanish armadas needs to be readdressed. The privy council did have a well-planned procedure, on paper at least, to mobilise sizeable amounts of men and material for home defence. That these forces and

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<sup>63</sup> Hammer, *Elizabeth's Wars*, pp. 145-47; Wernham, *Before the Armada*, pp. 387-394.

<sup>64</sup> Nolan, 'The Muster of 1588', p. 387; the view that England was unprepared see Garrett Mattingly, *The Armada* (New York, 1984), pp. 309-11 and Geoffrey Parker, 'If the Armada had landed', in Geoffrey Parker (ed.) *Spain and the Netherlands, 1559-1659* (London, 1979), p. 139.

<sup>65</sup> Neil Younger, 'The Practice and Politics of Troop-Raising: Robert Devereux, Second Earl of Essex, and the Elizabethan Regime', *EHR*, vol. 127, no. 526 (June 2012), pp. 566-91, esp. pp. 567- 8.

infrastructure were never tested in any meaningful battle should not take away from the administrative and organisational effort that the privy council, the clerks, lord lieutenants and captains had to put in, often in a short space of time, to fend off enemy incursions.

It is clear that the legacy of the great muster and the preparations surrounding it still influenced privy councillors eleven years later, as when Henry Lord Cobham wrote to Cecil urging the queen to take the reports that the Spanish were using Dunkirk as a launch pad seriously: 'I know not how it may be taken, and therefore pray your advice, and that you will move Her Majesty in it. My father did the like in '88'.<sup>66</sup> There were also practical similarities in the way that the 1599 muster copied from the previous muster, for example in the use of the trained bands system. This system divided England's militia into two categories: the trained bands which were armed and drilled for modern warfare; and the general muster who were armed with just bows and bills, or pikes.<sup>67</sup> The numbers of men raised in 1599 were smaller than in 1588, as at this time Essex had been sent with an army of around 16,000 foot and 1,300 horse to Ireland, so that the total army mustered stood at 24,000 foot and 1,230 horse.<sup>68</sup> This was still a considerable force, but the army mustered to repel the grand armada numbered about double that (46,000 foot and horse in total).<sup>69</sup> It is important to note that there had been a need to reform the raising of troops which had been instigated by Essex in 1597.<sup>70</sup> These reforms were designed to streamline the command structure of the militia and to make sure that only the fittest men, and the best commanders and equipment were available when called upon. The reforms were only centred around the southern counties, which were to form special bands comprising of 100-500 men to which the privy council appointed captains. 'Superintendents' were also appointed and were placed in charge of three bands each and whose responsibilities crossed county boundaries. This had the added advantage of taking

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<sup>66</sup> Cobham to Cecil, 31 July 1599, SP 12/271 f.215r.

<sup>67</sup> Nolan, 'The Muster of 1588', pp. 390-91.

<sup>68</sup> Hammer, *Elizabeth's wars*, p.212; *HMC Foljambe*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>69</sup> Nolan, 'The Muster 1588', pp. 405-6.

<sup>70</sup> Younger, 'Politics of Troop Raising', p. 579.

away some of the emphasis on local interests which pervaded troop raising before the 1597 reforms.<sup>71</sup>

As in 1588, troops were brought back from the cautionary towns to give added experience and extra training to those in the trained bands who had little or no experience in modern warfare. To this end on 2 August 1599, Sir Robert Sidney received orders to 'make choice of 300 of the best and most ancient soldiers in that garrison and to send them over, with their captains and officers', and a further 2,000 men were requisitioned from the English forces in the Low Countries to join those of the trained bands.<sup>72</sup> This was similar to the preparations to resist the grand armada, with a thousand men being transferred from the garrisons of the cautionary towns to England by the end of 1587; plans were drawn up in June 1587 to remove Lord Willoughby and another 2,000 men.<sup>73</sup>

There are further comparisons to be made between both musters in the securing of light horses from not only the nobility but also the clergy, as they were expected to play their part in the defence of the realm as they had done in 1588. A letter from the privy council to the archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift, requested him to gather together '559 lances, light horse and petronels, besides a good number of foot, to attend her Majesty's person', as this was the number provided in 1588, so it was expected that the clergy would supply the same number again.<sup>74</sup> As Nolan has pointed out, the effective organisation and use of light cavalry to harass and disrupt any invading force was quite novel during its conception in 1588 and, given that many of the orders sent out by the privy council in 1599 consisted of the organisation of light cavalry, it seems that this approach was very much carried on.<sup>75</sup> Given the number of similarities between the two musters it would be safe to assume that Cecil and the privy council

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 580.

<sup>72</sup> *HMC Foljambe*, f. 226b, pp. 75-76; *HMC De L'Isle and Dudley*, vol.2, p. 381; Wernham, *Return of the Armadas*, pp. 267-68.

<sup>73</sup> Nolan, 'The Muster of 1588', p. 394; Summary memorial of the state of war Holland and Flanders, 10 June 1587, *CSPF*, 1558-1589, vol. 21 part 3 [April-December 1587 (Holland and Flanders)], p. 106; Walsingham to Sir William Russell, 11 June 1587, SP 84/15 f.82r.

<sup>74</sup> *HMC Foljambe*, f.224, pp. 72-73; f.195, p. 57; Nolan, 'The Muster of 1588', p. 399.

<sup>75</sup> *HMC Foljambe*, pp. 78-82, 83-84, Nolan, 'The Muster of 1588', pp. 397-8.



must have retained copies of orders from 1588 to use in their own time. This was sensible as it enabled them to organise a large body of men at a time when manpower was so short and resources scarce. Ultimately, it must be stated that regardless of the efficiency with which the trained bands were mustered, potential battle plans drawn up and victuals and arms distributed, the privy council and Cecil were wrong to mobilise as there was actually no armada converging on England. It can be argued that it was a prudent precaution at the time, but it was a costly and unnecessary mobilisation which was put in motion due to the overly alarmist reports which the privy council had chosen to believe and the desire not to be caught cold as they had done in the previous few years.

### Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the 'invisible' armada of July-August 1599 deserves more attention by scholars than it has previously been given. This is because there is much that this episode can tell historians about the anxiety and uncertainty which surrounded England and its political elite in regards to the country's vulnerability and about how the events taking place in Europe had an impact on the thinking of men such as Cecil. It has also provided a case study in the difficulty of discerning between true and false intelligence. The intelligence that Cecil was receiving from Spain had not been entirely accurate but parts of it were (such as the reports from Harwick that there was infighting and indecision in Spanish high command); this in turn had an impact on what Cecil believed. This can be established by his letters to Sir Henry Neville, in which he had stated that even though he believed that the Spanish would not attack England that summer, he was forced to bend to the will of the queen and the majority of the privy council who were convinced that the Spanish could attack from the port of Brest. This change of viewpoint was perhaps also influenced by the fact that on 6 August the spotters on the Isle of Wight thought they had spotted the Spanish fleet and so fired their warning beacons, causing widespread panic for a short time; they had in fact mistaken the 'fleet' for

some merchant ships.<sup>76</sup> Cecil had received warnings of a build-up of ships within Spanish ports and, crucially, this information had reached him in good time for him to act on it and to formulate his own opinion on the suspected crisis. This stands in contrast to 1596 and 1597, when he had been let down by his intelligence and left in the dark on the turn of events. This chapter has shown that Cecil's intelligence network was improving and would prove its worth in the coming years.

The invisible armada episode did highlight a problem for Cecil: his lack of control over the flow of information. As has been shown in previous chapters, other privy councillors and lord lieutenants had their own agents and informers, albeit not on as large a scale as Cecil. This meant that Cecil could, at times, struggle to get his own viewpoint across, especially during something as serious as a rumour of invasion, which inevitably polarised opinions. This may have been because of the recent death of his father, Lord Burghley, who had, at least during the 1590s, been the one man whose opinion counted above all others on matters of state. This was the first time that Cecil had faced a major crisis without the support and influence of his father beside him. Arguably, he only achieved any comparable level of predominance after Essex's execution in 1601. Another aspect that explains the mobilisation at both land and sea which historians have not fully considered is the geopolitical situation in Europe at the time. Philip III's perceived aggression in pursuing the war with England and the Dutch and the Infanta's claims to the English succession must have had an influence on Cecil and the other privy councillors. They were not to know that Philip had much bigger problems to deal with and that he could not afford the amount of ships and men it would take to launch successfully another invasion attempt. This lack of control over the flow of information goes against the previously perceived view that Cecil had a monopolisation over the flow of information once he had been appointed principal secretary.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Wernham, *Return of the Armadas*, pp. 268-69; G. Coppin to Cecil, 9 August 1599, *HMCS*, vol. 9, 1599, pp. 282-83.

<sup>77</sup> Hsuan-Ying Tu, 'The Pursuit of God's Glory', pp. 312-13.

It is therefore unfair for William Lambarde, when writing to his friend Sir John Leveson just after the event, to comment that 'the ghost of Syr Fra. Walsingham groaneth to see England bared of a serviceable intelligencer'.<sup>78</sup> Cecil had received intelligence but the prevailing circumstances had moved far too rapidly for him to control, and the political and personal consequences were too severe for him to go against the tide of popular opinion.

This chapter has also shown that, just as in 1588, the mustering of the trained bands and the organisation of the navy were carried out with great proficiency and skill. The invisible armada should be seen as another example of how the Elizabethan government, when hard pushed, could organise a massive logistical undertaking in a relatively short space of time, although the precedent of 1588 and the fact that England had been on a war footing for eleven years must have made the mobilisation process easier to implement. These fears of Spanish invasion would be partly validated in 1601 when, as we will see, the Spanish were able to land soldiers and equipment in Ireland. This coupled with the increasing uncertainty over the Elizabethan succession meant that Cecil had to rely on his intelligence networks more and more as the final years of Elizabeth's reign unfolded.

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<sup>78</sup> William Lambarde to Sir John Leveson, 1 September 1599, accessed via The Sutherland Collection, Staffordshire & Stoke on Trent Archive Service: <https://www.search.sutherlandcollection.org.uk/details.aspx?ResourceID=1457&ExhibitionPage=5&ExhibitionID=1481&PageIndex=1&Keyword=lambarde&DateFrom=0&DateTo=2019&SortOrder=0&ThemeID=0> accessed on 01/02/2019.

## Chapter 6: Sir Robert Cecil and the Elizabethan Succession

The 1599 'invisible armada' had demonstrated that parts of Sir Robert Cecil's intelligence network were working well for him, but at the same time that it was hard for Cecil to put forward the information that he had obtained without it being challenged from other sources available to the privy council. As his letter to Sir Henry Neville, the English ambassador to Paris, had shown, he did not yet feel that his position was strong enough to enable him to control the flow of information.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, his letter to Neville also hinted that he did not feel that Spain was adequately covered and that he needed an additional agent, in this case a Frenchman, who could enter Spain more easily to acquire more detailed intelligence on ship numbers and movements.<sup>2</sup> Cecil's uneasiness in 1599 can be attributed to the figure of the Earl of Essex, as by the time that Cecil wrote to Neville, Essex, as lord lieutenant in Ireland, potentially had the opportunity to pull off military successes which would put Cecil's administrative achievements in the shade. Of course, this was averted by Essex's sudden return from Ireland in September 1599 and his subsequent loss of royal favour.

For the next ten months, Essex remained under house arrest, a still-dangerous presence on the political stage. Nevertheless, the year 1600 was one of relative success in regard to English fortunes abroad. Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy, was appointed as the new Lord Lieutenant in Ireland, ably assisted by Sir George Carew. Mountjoy arrived in Ireland on 26 February and his shrewd generalship gradually began to turn the tide in favour of the royal forces. On the continent, the Spanish suffered a series of setbacks and stalemates in their war with the Dutch, most notably the battle of Nieuwpoort on 2 July 1600, where both sides suffered heavy losses but Prince Maurice claimed to have won the day as the Spanish had retreated. By the winter of 1600/1601 both the Dutch and Spanish had settled down to plot

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<sup>1</sup> Cecil to Sir Henry Neville, 17 August 1599, cited in, Winwood, *Memorials*, pp. 90-92.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 92.

their spring offensives and with the situation in Ireland becoming more settled, Cecil could be confident that an invasion of England was unlikely.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter will explore and analyse the period from the aftermath of Essex's execution on 25 February 1601 to the few months after Elizabeth's death in March 1603, during which Cecil consolidated his position for the future. During this short period Cecil had a huge amount of issues and problems on his agenda, from the wars on the continent and Ireland, keeping himself informed of any foreign plots and invasion plans, dealing with political strife at home and the looming succession issue that could no longer be put off. This was his primary focus, as by 1601 Elizabeth's illnesses had become increasingly frequent (despite her best efforts to disguise this fact).<sup>4</sup> To this end, he needed intelligence on the person whom he thought had the best claim and chance to maintain peace and security within the realm: James VI, King of Scotland. Furthermore, Cecil needed to monitor any other potential rivals to James' claim, such as the Archduke Albert and his wife the Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia, who had a claim to the English throne through her distant relative John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster.<sup>5</sup>

As Thomas M. McCoog and Albert Loomie have shown, the Spanish council of state had counselled Phillip III on 1 February 1601 to promote Isabella's claims, and on 12 February the King had instructed his ambassador in Rome, the Duke of Sessa, to open discussions with the Pope on the subject. However, Rome's support was never forthcoming, as they feared a return of Spanish dominance over the papacy and, furthermore, Henry IV of France did not want to become encircled by the Habsburgs if the Infanta and the Archduke succeeded Elizabeth.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Wernham, *Return of the Armadas*, pp. 327-41; Allen, *Pax Hispanica*, pp. 43-51.

<sup>4</sup> Guy, *Elizabeth: The Forgotten Years*, pp. 362-64, 373-75.

<sup>5</sup> See genealogical chart no. 2 for the claims of the Infanta of Spain in Susan Doran and Paulina Kewes (eds.), *Doubtful and Dangerous*, p. xv.

<sup>6</sup> Albert J Loomie, 'Philip III and the Stuart Succession in England', pp. 492-514; Thomas M. McCoog, S.J., 'A view from abroad: continental powers and the succession', in Doran and Kewes (eds.) *Doubtful and Dangerous*, pp. 257-275.

The question of whether Cecil himself considered the possibility of supporting the Infanta's claim is difficult to assess. As Alexandra Gajda has argued, there was, in Essex's view, a party led by Cecil and including Lord Howard of Effingham, Lord Buckhurst and Thomas Egerton who wanted to sound out the possibility of the Infanta's claim. Essex seems to have been convinced that they were in fact conspiring for her succession.<sup>7</sup> An alternative, and arguably more persuasive view is that of Albert Loomie, who argued that letters sent to Parsons from the English faction were actually 'a probe into Spain's real intentions on the succession' and that the basic reason for the approach had been that the queen's poor health had caused unrest among her privy councillors.<sup>8</sup>

The reasoning for rejecting the notion that Cecil seriously considered supporting the Infanta's claim has to do with Cecil's personality and upbringing. Firstly, as a committed protestant, and a son of Burghley at that, why would Cecil want to promote a catholic and a Habsburg who had been England's enemy for Cecil's entire life? Secondly, Cecil was adept at political manoeuvring: he knew the easiest way to learn about the Spanish intentions was to open up the possibility of English support for a catholic candidate. In the end, the king's response to the letters from the English faction was very cautious: he wrote back to the Duke of Sessa, 'You will say to him [Parsons] that I have now decided on the person who is to be proposed and assisted in the succession to that kingdom [England], and that it is a Catholic'.<sup>9</sup> This was fairly ambiguous to the English privy council, but at least they now knew that the Infanta's candidacy could not be ruled out. Unfortunately, the identity of who had acted as the go-between who had told the privy council what Philip had told Sessa has never been found out.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Alexandra Gajda, 'Essex and the "popish plot"', in Susan Doran and Paulina Kewes (eds.) *Doubtful and dangerous*, pp. 121-122.

<sup>8</sup> Loomie, 'Philip III and the Stuart Succession', pp. 499-500.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 501.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 500, footnote no. 5; Hurstfield, *Succession struggle*, p. 377.

### The political consequences of Essex's rebellion and execution, February 1601

An in-depth analysis of the details and circumstances that led to Essex's rebellion and subsequent execution on 25 February 1601 lies outside the scope of this thesis; the focus instead will be to examine the political consequences and the effect that the rebellion had on Cecil.<sup>11</sup> Essex's death ultimately left Cecil as one of the leading figures of the privy council during the final two years of Elizabeth's reign.

The question of the relations between the Cecils and Essex, and Robert Cecil's role in Essex's fall, have been much debated by historians in recent years, with Patrick Martin perhaps going too far in describing Cecil and Essex as 'fire and ice, passion and prudence, courage against cunning', as there is plenty of evidence to show co-operation between the two.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, such was Cecil's high profile role, first in placing Essex under house arrest and then putting him on trial for rebellion and illegally negotiating with the Irish rebel Tyrone, that some historians such as Gajda and Natalie Mears have suggested that Cecil and his supporters had conspired to force Essex into rebellion on their terms, thus guaranteeing its failure and with it his political oblivion.<sup>13</sup> This narrative can be viewed as overtly critical of Cecil in that it suggests that Essex had little or no control over the political decisions that he made or that he was unaware of the impact of those decisions. A noble brought up within the social circles of Elizabethan high society, he had more political awareness than he is often given credit for and was, therefore, responsible for his own actions.

To illustrate her point, Gajda has shown that Cecil and his supporters had all been appointed to prestigious and influential posts within the government such as Lord Buckhurst becoming Lord Treasurer (May 1599), Raleigh becoming Governor of Jersey (August 1600) and Cecil's

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<sup>11</sup> For studies of Essex's rebellion see Mervyn James, 'At a crossroads of political culture: the Essex revolt 1601', in his *Society, Politics and Culture in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 415-65; Hammer, 'Shakespeare's Richard II, the play of 7 February 1601, and the Essex rising', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 59, (April 2008), pp. 1-35.

<sup>12</sup> Martin, *Elizabethan espionage*, p. 101.

<sup>13</sup> Alexandra Gajda, Essex and the 'popish plot', in Susan Doran and Paulina Kewes (eds.), *Doubtful and Dangerous*, pp. 115-133; Natalie Mears, 'Regnum Cecilianum? A Cecilian perspective of the court', in John Guy (ed.), *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, pp. 46-64.

brother-in-law Henry Brooke, Lord Cobham inheriting the title of warden of the cinque ports after his father's death in 1597. Additionally, Charles Howard had already been appointed Lord Admiral by this point and Cecil's older half-brother Thomas had been made president of the council of the north in 1599.<sup>14</sup> Paul Hammer has gone so far as to suggest that there was a specific anti-Essex faction intent on destroying the Earl, and that the Essex rising was Cecil's 'finest hour' as he was able to manipulate Essex into fatal mistakes that could be construed as treason and that led to his execution.<sup>15</sup> Again, Hammer arguably goes too far in suggesting that the blame for Essex's fall rests on his enemies, as this absolves the blame for Essex's own actions and puts it onto the shoulders of others. He is, however, correct to assume that Cecil was not entirely innocent during Essex's fall. Cecil clearly wanted to control the succession, an area in which Essex had stolen a march on him by developing friendly relations with James VI. There is no doubt that Essex's removal allowed Cecil more easily to dictate the course of the Elizabethan succession.

The underlying argument of these historians is that Cecil's increasing dominance of government, and that his allies, had boxed Essex into a corner by denying him the opportunity to promote any of his other allies. On the other hand, recent work by Janet Dickinson on the perceived factionalism between the Cecils and Essex during the 1590s has argued convincingly for the opposite. In her view 'the only figure of real political significance in the Essexian factions was the Earl himself', and appointments to high political office were given to the men most suitable and most experienced to fulfil those roles; thus the lack of favour shown to Essex's allies was not the result of Cecilian hostility, but a result of the fact that Essex often backed candidates for office who were both junior in rank to their competitors or lacked the required experience for the roles in question.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, these repeated

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<sup>14</sup> Gajda, 'Essex and the "popish plot"', p. 116; for the dates when each of Cecil's supporters were appointed to their respective posts see *ODNB*.

<sup>15</sup> Hammer, 'The Essex Rising in historical context', lecture delivered at the Shakespearean Authorship Trust Conference 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0GNb\\_rgJ5Lo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0GNb_rgJ5Lo)

<sup>16</sup> Dickinson, *Court Politics*, pp. 107-108.



failures must have reinforced Essex's view that he was steadily being isolated from political influence.<sup>17</sup>

However, from Cecil's point of view the appointments of those who could support him allowed him to safeguard, for the time being, his own political position at a time of immense uncertainty. Seen in this light it only made sense for someone in Cecil's position to anchor himself in a position of strength and influence and it would be naïve to think that other privy councillors were not doing the same to secure their own futures.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, even though Hurstfield calls the last two years of Elizabeth's reign 'Cecil's years', Thomas Coakley has argued that Cecil was in fact part of a triumvirate of powerful privy councillors which included Charles Howard of Effingham and the lord treasurer, Lord Buckhurst.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the Cecilian faction disintegrated as soon as the succession of James VI was achieved. By the end of 1603, both Cobham and Raleigh had been imprisoned in the tower of London for their parts in the Bye and Main plots which involved plans to kidnap the new king and hold him under their influence.<sup>20</sup> In fact, during their secret correspondence with James during the years leading up to his accession, Henry Howard repeatedly planted suggestions in James's mind that Cobham and Raleigh were untrustworthy and foolish conspirators.<sup>21</sup> Howard also wrote to Cecil to urge him to 'dissolue them before they ascende into thos highe regions' and that he wanted to entrap Cobham and Raleigh by letting them correspond with James's ministers and then reveal it to the queen, thus removing them as a potential threat (nothing ultimately came of this plan).<sup>22</sup>

In this regard, the concept of a 'Cecilian faction' should not be taken to encompass a group of people with the specific goal of the destruction of Essex. Rather it was a group of individuals,

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, pp. 101-06.

<sup>18</sup> Joel Hurstfield, *Freedom, Corruption and Government in Elizabethan England* (London, 1973), pp. 126-134.

<sup>19</sup> Hurstfield, *Corruption*, p. 133; Coakley, 'Robert Cecil in Power', pp. 66-67.

<sup>20</sup> Coakley, 'Cecil in Power', pp. 74-75.

<sup>21</sup> Alexander Courtney, 'The Secret Correspondence of James VI 1601-3', in Doran and Kewes (eds.), *Doubtful and Dangerous*, pp. 143-44.

<sup>22</sup> Courtney, 'Secret Correspondence', p. 143; Coakley, 'Cecil in Power', p. 74.

in this case Cecil, Cobham, Howard, Raleigh and Buckhurst, each intent on securing their own futures, by either giving the appearance of working for or against each other, as and when the situation arose. This is not to deny that Cecil and his allies worked ruthlessly to destroy Essex in the aftermath of his 'rebellion'. Questier, for example, has convincingly shown how 'Essex's enemies' used his ties to notable English catholics, coupled with his ill-advised meeting with Tyrone, to further his fall from political favour.<sup>23</sup> What is clear, however, is that had the roles been reversed Essex would have done all he could to discredit and remove Cecil and his supporters from their positions, with all the consequences that this would have entailed for the succession and future English peace policies.

#### Scotland and the secret correspondence with James VI

With the execution of the Earl of Essex on 25 February 1601, James VI, King of Scotland, lost his most important English supporter for his claim to the English throne that he had been carefully nurturing throughout the 1590s. As Hammer argues, Essex and James's 'secret growth of trust had a political logic to it', as Essex needed to secure his position after Elizabeth died and he wanted to be the driving force shaping England's future. For his part, James needed a strong supporter in England to further his claim, and by 1594 he judged that Essex was that person.<sup>24</sup> In fact, an alliance between James and Robert Cecil seemed extremely unlikely to any Scottish or English diplomat during the 1590s. James was deeply suspicious of and hostile to the Cecils, in particular to Burghley, as he saw him as the chief architect of his mother's death. The king also made clear his hostility to Cecil when writing to Essex on 6 October 1595: 'I am glad that he who rules all there [Cecil] is begun to be loathed at by the best and greatest sort there, since he is my enemy'.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Michael Questier, *Dynastic Politics and the British Reformations, 1558-1630* (Oxford, 2019), pp. 255-59.

<sup>24</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, pp. 169-170.

<sup>25</sup> James VI to Essex, 6 October 1595, G.P.V Akrigg (ed.), *Letters of King James VI and I* (Berkeley, CA, 1984), pp. 142-43; Gajda, Essex and the 'popish plot', p. 124.

In spite of this, with Essex's demise, James quickly realised that he now needed to cultivate Cecil as an ally and the same could be said in reverse for Cecil. This was especially crucial as James had almost committed himself to helping Essex with his planned revolt. The plan was devised by Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy, who had replaced Essex as lord deputy in Ireland. His plan was to take 4,000-5,000 troops from Ireland to join with English forces, to free Essex and proclaim James as king. Unfortunately for Essex, once he was released from house arrest, Mountjoy shelved his proposal.<sup>26</sup> James had wisely remained non-committal but he had, in November 1599, invited his nobles to ascribe their names to a General Band for the maintenance of his title to England.<sup>27</sup> This showed that he was not meekly waiting for Elizabeth to die, but at the same time he was very cautious about using military force to press his claim. If he had then, he would have been in breach of the terms of the 1585 Act for the Queen's Surety, under which, if his actions endangered the queen's life, his claim would be forfeited, in theory at least.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, with the fear that rumours of his correspondence with Mountjoy would be discovered, and that he could be linked in some way to Essex's revolt, James dispatched two ambassadors; John Erskine, Earl of Mar, and Edward Bruce, Commendator of Kinloss, to London, where they arrived on 6 March 1601.<sup>29</sup> Their instructions were to sound out whether James's name had been mentioned in connection with Essex and to secure a more adequate pension from the queen. Despite sending assurances that his name had indeed not been mentioned, Mar and Kinloss still could not gain an audience with the queen. Without any other options, on 29 April, they contacted Cecil to remind him about the serious implications of their embassy's failure, if they were not granted an audience urgently.<sup>30</sup> Cecil had already received word from George Nicolson, his agent in Scotland, informing him that the Duke of Lennox was

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<sup>26</sup> Gajda, Essex and the 'popish plot', pp. 125-126.

<sup>27</sup> Pauline Croft, *King James* (Basingstoke, 2003), p. 44.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>29</sup> Courtney, 'Secret Correspondence', p.137.

<sup>30</sup> The Earl of Mar and the Abbot of Kinloss to Cecil, 29 April 1601, *CSPScot*, 1547-1603, vol. 13, part II [1600-1603], pp. 812-13.

in the process of preparing an embassy to France in order to resurrect the 'auld alliance', but only on the condition that Mar and Kinloss's embassy failed.<sup>31</sup>

The traditional view of Cecil quickly seizing upon James as his preferred candidate during the meeting between Mar and Kinloss held in May 1601 has been challenged. Historians who have held this traditionalist view include David H. Wilson, who stated that it must have seemed 'a miracle' to the Scottish ambassadors when Cecil offered to correspond with James.<sup>32</sup> John Guy echoes this view, as he believed that Cecil's firm purpose 'was to create the atmosphere in which he could engineer the smooth accession of James VI' and Richard Rex went further, stating that the succession to the throne was 'wrapped up' before Elizabeth's death.<sup>33</sup> This view has been challenged by Alexander Courtney, who has shown that it was in fact Mar and Kinloss who first offered Cecil the chance to correspond with James and that Cecil actually considered their offer very carefully.<sup>34</sup> As Courtney points out, in Cecil's first few letters to James he wrote that he was responding to the 'embassadors sommons' and their 'ouvertures' and not the other way around.<sup>35</sup>

Although Cecil and James did occasionally write personally to each other, the main participants in the correspondence were actually Lord Henry Howard, who wrote on Cecil's behalf, and Kinloss, who wrote on James's. Henry Howard (later the Earl of Northampton), was a crypto-catholic and the younger brother of the executed Thomas Howard, fourth duke of Norfolk. He tried to resurrect his political career by attaching himself first to Essex and then to Cecil for political preferment. The secret letters were carried unwittingly by Nicolson (who was referred to derogatorily as 'the pigeon'). The letters travelled by the diplomatic post to London from Edinburgh, with the letters themselves disguised as packets from the Scottish court to French Huguenot noblemen, and the replies from London passed back along the

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<sup>31</sup> George Nicolson to Cecil, 7 April 1601, SP 52/67 f.63r-v.

<sup>32</sup> David H. Wilson, *King James VI and I* (Minnesota, 1963), p. 153.

<sup>33</sup> John Guy, *Tudor England* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 452-4; Richard Rex, *Elizabeth I: Fortune's Bastard* (London, 2003), p.144.

<sup>34</sup> Courtney, 'Secret Correspondence', p. 139.

<sup>35</sup> CJRC, pp. 4,12; Courtney, 'Secret Correspondence', p.139.

same route.<sup>36</sup> Once the letters were delivered to either the English court it is likely that Howard and Cecil must have both read the letter and between them wrote out a reply before carefully slipping it back into Nicolson's diplomatic bag for his return leg to Edinburgh. This must have also been the procedure in which Mar and James undertook, as both Cecil and James must have wanted to have a careful personal input into the composition of the secret letters and not leave them wholly to their respective intermediaries. As Courtney has asserted, the keynote to the correspondence was Cecil advising James how to ensure good relations with Elizabeth and urging him to disregard any rumours or gossip about other claimants doing the rounds within the English court. There was little discussion of policy matters and the question of exactly how James was going to be crowned king of England was not mentioned.<sup>37</sup> In his second letter to James, Cecil conveyed to him in a humble but subtly firm way that he should 'distinguish between the pamphlets and proiects of priests and fugitues, who are alwaies labouring to sett up one golden calf or other ... and the negotiations between princes or their ministers, retaining such belief in some well chosen professions, as neyther to be ielous of sylence because you hear other idele ecchos'; that is, Cecil advised him to ignore rumours or attempts by would-be troublemakers to confuse the issue of his succession. Cecil stressed that even though 'everything we do is not howerly mad demonstratiue to yow', James was to trust that Cecil and Howard were doing their utmost to support his interests at court.<sup>38</sup>

It was important for the secrecy of the correspondence, and for Cecil's future position, that he and Howard had James's complete trust and that he would not agitate publicly for his right of succession, especially since Elizabeth had chosen William Stanley, sixth Earl of Derby, brother of the supposedly poisoned Ferdinando, to take Essex's place as a Knight of the Garter on 23 April 1601. James's anxiety could have been further piqued by the promotion of Edward Seymour, first Earl of Hertford, to the lord lieutenancies of Somerset and Wiltshire on

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<sup>36</sup> Courtney, 'Secret Correspondence', p. 139; Helena Georgia Stafford, *James VI of Scotland and the Throne of England* (New York and London, 1940), pp. 255-57.

<sup>37</sup> Courtney, 'Secret Correspondence', pp. 140-44.

<sup>38</sup> *CJRC*, 10 [Cecil] to 30 [King James] 4 October 1601, Letter no. IV, pp. 12-13,

24 April. Since these two men both had claims to the throne themselves, James may have felt these appointments smacked of favouritism on the queen's part; a notion Cecil would have been keen to dissuade him of.<sup>39</sup> For James's part, in response to Cecil's entreaties to keep himself out of trouble, he promised to 'neuer in substance uarie one iote from these main pointes quhiche at oure first acquaintance I did promise, and uowe unto you'. He assured Cecil that 'both ye and youre faithful colleague 40 [Charles Howard, Earl of Nottingham] haue by youre uigilant and iudiciouse caire, so ayselie settelid me in the only richt course for my goode'.<sup>40</sup> James was as good as his word, doing nothing to antagonise Elizabeth during the rest of her life, and avoiding giving the impression that his actions could be seen to antagonise English interests (interests which would soon become his own responsibility). This was no doubt greatly helped by Cecil persuading the queen to increase James's pension to £5,000 a year.<sup>41</sup>

James VI's rule during the 1590s had been defined by his struggles to maintain peace between his fractious nobility. There had been persistent feuding between the catholic Earl of Huntly and the protestant Earl of Moray, and the machinations of the protestant Earl of Bothwell, which ended in these men being exiled, with only Huntly returning in July 1596 without James's permission.<sup>42</sup> James also had to manage the Scottish Kirk, which increasingly encroached on his royal prerogative and further inflamed the religious tensions that James was trying to balance. Added to this, was the real fear that the Spanish would intrigue with the catholic Scottish Earls to put pressure on James to convert to catholicism and make Scotland a back door into England. This fear was realised in the affair of the 'Spanish blanks' in 1592. These were sheets of paper, signed by Huntly along with other catholic nobles, inviting Phillip II to

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<sup>39</sup> Stanley, William, sixth earl of Derby (bap. 1561, d. 1642), nobleman; Seymour, Edward, first earl of Hertford (1539?–1621), courtier, *ODNB*.

<sup>40</sup> Although the original editor of the secret correspondence John Bruce had noted that the identity of '40' is yet to be discovered, Alexander Courtney has stated that '40' denotes Charles Howard and that '50' denotes the Lord Treasurer Buckhurst. See Courtney, 'Secret Correspondence', p. 144; *CJRC*, 30 [King James] to 10 [Cecil], 3 June 1602, Letter no V, p. 15.

<sup>41</sup> Courtney, 'Secret Correspondence', p. 139.

<sup>42</sup> Croft, *King James*, pp. 31-36; Wilson, *King James VI and I*, pp. 98-115

set out his terms for another invasion of England with Scotland's aid.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, by the time Cecil had set up his secret correspondence, James could feel much more secure on his Scottish throne. The interference by the kirk was diminished, as was the feuding between his nobility, and he had good relations with both catholic and protestant countries.<sup>44</sup> Pauline Croft has stated that James 'could feel proud of his achievements' and that he was 'emerging from a difficult minority to reassert royal power', but that there were 'visible flaws' in both his character and approach to kingship.<sup>45</sup> Sometimes, as in the case of the Earl of Huntly, he put his trust in the wrong people and his court had gained a reputation for high expenditure and heavy drinking, James's lack of concern for finance often led to clashes with his parliaments. In essence his style was the complete opposite to the court that Elizabeth had built and that her ministers had been used to.<sup>46</sup>

Cecil, therefore, needed not only to be sure of James' behaviour, but also the often unstable and unpredictable machinations of the Scottish court and nobility. To this end, he relied on his main Scottish contacts which included George Nicolson, Cecil's long term English agent in Scotland, Thomas Douglas, a lesser scion of the Douglas clan, and Francis Mowbray, a long-time agent based in Scotland, who had served Burghley before being passed on to Cecil. During the years of Cecil's secret correspondence, 1601-1603, he needed to make sure that James did not come under the influences of the catholic Earls or their supporters, as this would jeopardise James's candidacy. Furthermore, Cecil needed to be sure that his supporters in Scotland, namely the Earls of Mar and Kinloss, were not ousted from royal favour.

During these two years there were many crypto-catholic Scottish nobles, such as Patrick Gray, sixth Earl of Gray, and George Gordon, first marquess of Huntly, whom Cecil needed to make sure did not disrupt James's planned succession. There was also the exiled catholic Francis Stuart, first Earl of Bothwell, who, as James's cousin, had plotted and schemed against him

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<sup>43</sup> Croft, *King James*, pp. 27-31, 34; Wilson, *King James VI and I*, pp. 110-12.

<sup>44</sup> Croft, *King James*, p. 43.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p.44.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 46-47.

before being exiled from Scotland in March 1595.<sup>47</sup> It was Nicolson who, on 11 November 1601, alerted Cecil to letters being sent to the Duke of Lennox, then in exile on the continent, to gain his support to discredit the Earl of Mar.<sup>48</sup> This was because Mar had the guardianship of James's first-born son Henry. Although this was normal practice in Scotland, Queen Anne strongly disliked it and sought to diminish Mar in order to regain control of her son.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, there was also the feud between Huntly and the protestant Earl of Argyll, which Thomas Douglas reported to Cecil on 26 March 1602, that was of such animosity between the two men that they even challenged each other in the king's presence.<sup>50</sup> The letters which Cecil received from both Douglas and Nicolson are littered with reports of feuds between different Scottish nobles, each wanting to exert some form of influence over James. In fact, the greatest domestic threat to the secret correspondence actually came from James' wife, the Danish and catholic convert Queen Anne. In April 1602, she declared that she would intercept the letters, thus exposing those that James had been secretly writing to, which would politically destroy Cecil, Mar and his cousin Sir Thomas Erskine. There were even vague reports that Anne was plotting 'against the king's person (if not against his life) and against the lives of some of his most trusty councillors and servants'.<sup>51</sup> Luckily, Cecil and Howard had warned Mar and Kinloss about the threat of the discovery of the letters, and they were able to take steps to protect the route that their despatches took through Berwick.<sup>52</sup> In truth, James's succession, and Cecil's plans for it, was threatened not so much by the machinations of the Scottish court but mostly by actors on the continent, especially in Spain, the Low Countries and Rome.

The secret correspondence between Cecil and James can only be described as a diplomatic and political coup. The stakes were extremely high for both parties and it was remarkable that

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<sup>47</sup> For the biography of the earl of Bothwell, Gray and Huntly see their respective entries in *ODNB*.

<sup>48</sup> George Nicolson to Cecil, 11 November 1601, *CSPScot*, 1547-1603, vol. 13 part 2 [1600-1603] p. 805; SP 52/67 f.79r.

<sup>49</sup> Croft, *King James*, p. 24; Wilson, *King James VI and I*, pp.156-157; Courtney, 'Secret Correspondence', pp. 142-43.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Douglas to Cecil, 26 March 1602, *CSPScot*, 1547-1603, vol. 13, part II [1600-1603], p. 810.

<sup>51</sup> *CSPScot*, 1547-1603, vol 13, part II, [1600-1603], pp. 773, 829, 899, 902-3, 932, 941, 945, 970-1, 976, 1029, 1049-50, 1091-2; Courtney, 'Secret Correspondence', p. 143; Croft, *King James*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>52</sup> Courtney, 'Secret Correspondence', p. 143; George Nicolson to Cecil, 10 June 1602, *CSPScot*, 1547-1603, vol. 13, part II [1600-1603], p. 1001.



(as far as we know) Elizabeth and many other members of the English and Scottish privy councils were kept in the dark about the correspondence. For Cecil personally it could have ended in disaster, as if Elizabeth had caught even a hint of her leading minister writing to a foreign prince without her consent then Cecil might have faced very severe consequences. Nevertheless, they were risks that Cecil had to take to ensure that he kept his position of power and influence after Elizabeth's death and in this, as we will see later on in the chapter, he most definitely succeeded.

#### Cecil's agents in Europe during 1600-1601

The main theatres in which Cecil focussed his intelligence in this period were Ireland and the Low Countries. This was firstly because of the Elizabethan soldiers which were deployed there, and secondly because of their potential to become springboards for any invasion of the English mainland. This explains Cecil's reliance upon Thomas Phelippes and Levinus Munk and their agents in the Low Countries and in Rome. Quite often the agents whom Cecil recruited to work within the Low Countries were ex-soldiers who had had some experience of fighting there. They had either deserted or wanted patronage of some kind. George Kendall seemed no different in this regard when he first contacted Cecil on 5 November 1600. In his letter, he gave an account of his background and his reasoning for wanting to work for Cecil. Kendall had been a scholar at the queen's school in Westminster before joining the army, in which he served for seven years in the Low Countries. Frustratingly, he gave no dates as to the time frame of his service nor for his years as a scholar, but he explains why he left the army. He said that his eldest brother had also fought in the Low Countries but he had been killed, which led his father to be 'made weak by tedious suits in law, overmastered by greatness and not by justice; also to recover some evidences which my brother lost in the Low Countries'.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, he reasoned that by working for Cecil he may be able to earn enough money to

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<sup>53</sup> George Kendall to Cecil, 5 November 1600, SP 12/275 f.180r.

assist his father. He also claimed that he could find no better way to serve 'the honour of God, my country, and cause, to gain patronage and merit of preferment ... I must entreat that I may be able to hide away, a rapier, a scarfe a pik or such likie to gain frendship, and not by scarsyty to be pinched, w[hi]ch is as ill a companion to a souldior as excesse'..<sup>54</sup> Cecil may not have been entirely convinced of these professions of loyalty and godliness but he did take the word of Thomas Honiman, whom Kendall states was his suitor to Cecil.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, Honiman told Cecil the details of Kendall's intended plan for his activities in the Low Countries. Kendall had written to Honiman back in October 1600, outlining his plan to infiltrate Sir William Stanley's regiment. He had met one George Weekes, who had been an old soldier and steward to Stanley for eleven years, had commanded his own garrison and had been given the place of honour within the regiment on many occasions.<sup>56</sup> Crucially, he had been very close to Stanley, so much so that his second in command, Lieutenant Jacques, was jealous of Weekes' influence, and had contrived to have him dismissed, causing a rift between Stanley and Jacques. Kendall's plan was to get Weekes reinstated within Stanley's regiment; from there he would be ideally placed to gain intelligence of Stanley's plans and in turn sow dissension within their ranks, in order to 'break that regiment of English'.<sup>57</sup> Kendall assured Honiman that Weekes was 'beloved by the English [regiment], as he is exceedingly bountiful, resolute and fortunate ... He is resolute and will be loyal to what he undertakes'.<sup>58</sup>

Cecil must have been persuaded by Honiman's recommendation to sanction Kendall's plan, since he had his intelligence secretary, Levinus Munck, write up instructions for him and create a cipher for him to use whilst he was in the Low Countries. The instructions that Munck sent to Kendall detailed an extensive range of objectives that sought to make the most of Kendall's contacts and expertise, with the infiltration of Stanley's regiment being only one of these objectives. First of all, Kendall was to travel to Brussels, where Stanley, Owen (who was

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, SP 12/275 f.180r.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, SP 12/275 f.180r.

<sup>56</sup> Kendall to Honiman 4 October 1600, *CSPD*, 1598-1601, vol. 275, pp. 475-76.

<sup>57</sup> Kendall to Honiman 4 October 1600, *CSPD*, 1598-1601, vol. 275, p. 475.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, *CSPD*, 1598-1601, vol. 275, p. 476.

Stanley's priest and spymaster) and Jacques were based. Once there, he was to 'use all meanes possible to place y[ou]r self in acquaintance [with the likes of Stanley] ... be able to discover, when there is any motioning for entreprise [especially] yf it do[es] concerne any matter of the Low Countries'.<sup>59</sup> He was to send his letters to Middleburgh to a merchant called Ricardo Suniga who would then smuggle them to 'the Gouverner of Flissing'. If this line of communication was compromised then he had to send the letters to Calais, where a contact of Munck's called G.F. would make sure that he received Kendall's letters.<sup>60</sup>

Kendall was also instructed to follow Owen 'as much as you may, to whom the Priests and Jesuits here do address themselves'; he was also to find out which Jesuits Owens corresponded with and to ingratiate himself into their confidences if he could, and he was permitted to 'offer to helpe them to stay their lies, for so may you sooner get into their bosoms'.<sup>61</sup> He was also to try to become acquainted with the councillors of the archduke to find out more about the ongoing siege of Ostend, when was the archduke expecting reinforcements, would they be transported by land or sea, what ports would be used? Furthermore, he was to provide intelligence from the Dutch side, seeking the confidence of the secretaries of President Richardot, so he could 'seeke to sound whether there [may] be any meaning, bona fide, to have peace, and whether it be not true, that the Archduke is rather inclined to peace, then the King of Spayne'.<sup>62</sup>

Lastly, Kendall was instructed that, in the event of being asked about English views on peace, he was to answer that:

The Queen [had grown] very jealous since the meeting at Bulloigne [Boulogne],  
that the K[ing] of Spayne and the Archduke were not so foreward as before,  
whereof although there be divers of the Counsell, who doe make dayly

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<sup>59</sup> Instructions of George Kendall by Levinus Munck, 1600, SP 77/6 f. 235r.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, SP 77/6 f. 235r.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, SP 77/6 f. 235r.

<sup>62</sup> Instructions of George Kendall by Levinus Munck, 1600, SP 77/6 f. 235v.

representations to the Q[ueen] being no way favorable to a peace, yet, the generality of the kingdome and the people do desire it.<sup>63</sup>

It seemed highly unlikely that Kendall would realistically have been expected to complete all of the instructions that Munck, and by extension Cecil, had asked of him. More likely these instructions could be seen as giving an agent some idea of the sorts of information that he should be looking out for, from basic intelligence such as finding out troop movements and numbers to, infiltrating and gaining the confidences of enemies of the state, such as Stanley and Owen. Therefore, if one avenue of enquiry should fail or prove impossible to pursue, then there were other tasks which agents such as Kendall could complete and still prove their usefulness to Cecil.

However, in spite of the detailed instructions drawn up by Munck, Kendall's mission did not go according to plan, as he recounted in his report to Cecil, which was written in cipher, on 21 November (Old Style)/ 1 December 1600 (New Style). What had been meant to happen was that Weekes had been sent ahead of Kendall with the task of getting into the Low Countries and either entering the service of the Archduke or Stanley's regiment. Kendall was then sent in after him to rendezvous with Weekes at Calais. But what had actually transpired was that Weekes had gone to Paris; Kendall followed him and discovered that Weekes had been put off seeking entry into the Low Countries by one Captain Smith (a soldier in Stanley's regiment). Smith had, reported Kendall: 'consorted with him [Weekes] of purpose to undermine hime and to dismaie hime by pretendinge danger of his entrance in the cardinals [Archduke's?]'s contrye'. More worryingly, Weekes now appeared to have 'groune doubtful and slowe in his determination', and Smith had also persuaded Weekes' courier, John Ellis, to instead return to England on 'secret business' for Smith in return for some preferment.<sup>64</sup> To rectify the situation, Kendall wrote that he had managed to persuade one Roger of Canterbury, Smith's former lieutenant, to serve Cecil by turning Smith into his agent and thereby gaining inside

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, SP 77/6 f. 236r.

<sup>64</sup> George Kendall to Cecil in cipher, 21 November/ 1 December 1600, SP 77/6 f.229r.

information from Stanley. Kendall asked that Sir Thomas Fane, deputy lieutenant at Dover, allow Roger to land there unobstructed and that he vouched for him: 'wherein if he prove loyal I doubte him not and he ... shal double youre expectation in our doinges god directing us.'<sup>65</sup>

Kendall also wanted to assure Cecil that he would 'urge Weekes to goe to dorleanse [Orleans] wher he shal not sleepe withe out attemptinge his services acceptance by the cardinal'. He also wanted Cecil to send him ten pounds to cover the costs of his detours to find Weekes. He complained that Weekes seemed to be very unreliable: 'now disapynted by weekes his alterations in his iorney [journey], who in trothe haft [left] me noe order to finde him and I doubt if I had not ben quicker he would have lost me, for he toke letters of Tressham and to Paget to procure hime preferment in savoy but now I will not leave him til he acomplishe his promis'.<sup>66</sup>

Cecil replied to Kendall a week later on 6 December, clearly venting his disapproval and frustration.

As for Weekes, I know not what to say, considering ha hath so farr swerved already from his first purposes, as it seemeth he will hardly be drawn to it again ... he dabbled w[i]th Smyth and Smyth w[i]th him, and what your self shal be able to execute without I leave to yo[u]r self. Having gon as far [for] him I am loath till I see some p[r]oof as I am disposed, not so much for ye money for I think nothing lost yt is spent for her Ma[jesty's] service, but because it is a kind of scorn, for a man to be deceeved.<sup>67</sup>

He was also doubtful of using Ellis as a messenger: 'he seemeth too weake to commit any matt[er]s of her M[ajesty's] service, and besyd[e]s, you sho[w] not sound judgment ytwold have me tryst him. I therfore ad[d], doubt not but if yo[u] do yo[ur] soverain service, I will see you to all fulnes requited and maintained'.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, SP 77/6 f.229r.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, SP 77/6 f.229r.

<sup>67</sup> Cecil to Kendall, 6 December 1600, SP 12/275 f.217r.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, SP 12/275 f.217r.

With this rebuke stinging his ears, Kendall wisely waited until April 1601 before sending back to Cecil a meaningful report on his progress. He described how he went to Brussels with Captain Smith, but the Archduke refused their service and he blamed the likes of Jacques and Richardot for undermining them. He then met an English Jesuit, Father Lewknor, and managed to persuade him that he wanted to join the Jesuit college. Lewknor told him that the Jesuits felt that England was ruled by Cecil and his faction and all the important governmental posts were filled by his supporters. But in his view Cecil would be better to find a third faction to support the Infanta as she had the power and the prestige to reward Cecil for installing her as the new monarch. Whereas James VI could be toppled more easily and Lewknor was the man who could make this happen..<sup>69</sup>

This sort of intelligence would have been good news for Cecil, as the Jesuit order, who could potentially disrupt his succession plans, believed that England was stable and not vulnerable, and the fact that they wanted to back the Infanta's claim would have only confirmed Cecil's thinking. Finally, Kendall advised Cecil that he had persuaded a John Tipping, a former lieutenant of Stanley's, to come over to England to serve Cecil. He advised Cecil, however, that Tipping was 'a dangerous fellow' and that Cecil should not 'speak with any from abroad except in the company of good men; the proudest there can do no service for England'.<sup>70</sup> In truth, Kendall had not been able to fulfil the plan that he had promised to Cecil, which was to infiltrate Stanley's regiment, but he had managed to gain intelligence on the Jesuits' mindset and had a foothold in their camp which could be exploited at a later date. Unfortunately, in October 1601, Kendall was imprisoned in the Marshalsea whilst trying to attend Cecil at Windsor and he had begged Cecil to help procure his release so that he could continue tracking Prince Maurice of Nassau.<sup>71</sup> Cecil managed to secure his release and Kendall was able to send one more report from the Hague to Cecil before he disappears from the records. He reported that he was still with Nassau's forces, but that they would struggle to relieve

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<sup>69</sup> Kendall to Cecil, April 1601, SP 12/279 ff.127-128r-v.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, SP 12/279 f.128v.

<sup>71</sup> Kendall to Cecil, 3 October 1601, *HMCS*, 1601, vol. 11, pp. 402-03.

Ostend, which was at the time being garrisoned by Sir Francis Vere and surrounded by the Archduke's troops. Nonetheless, he had heard a rumour of mutiny in the Spanish ranks: 'which must enforce them to rise from before Ostend. The Duke is more than half procurer of it to save his honour and to be more able to reinforce himself against this spring'.<sup>72</sup>

Kendall's story demonstrated Cecil's predicament in trying to recruit reliable agents. Despite Munck and himself providing Kendall and Weekes with clear instructions, and different methods of passing their letters to and from the Low Countries, they could do nothing to control their agents once they were in the field. These agents were often alone, working in hostile terrain and unreliably paid. Thus it is perhaps not surprising that agents, such as Weekes, would abandon their tasks at the earliest opportunity, given that there could be far easier and often more reliably-paid work in supplying information and carrying letters for England's enemies. At least in Kendall's case, he had tried to stay true to Munck's instructions, although how useful the intelligence that he had provided Cecil was is hard to evaluate. At least his report on the opinions of the Jesuit priest Lewknor suggested that the image of a strong, stable England that he wanted to portray was causing the Jesuits to take pause on their plans to support an invasion of England. Furthermore, if Kendall could keep sending back ex-soldiers who had served Sir William Stanley, this might serve to provide information on his plans for Ireland and the succession. But overall, the recruitment of Kendall can be deemed only a partial success, something which Cecil would have been accustomed to by this time, as most agents during this period could be unpredictable and unreliable. To balance out this underwhelming intelligence, Cecil could rely on the more experienced Thomas Phelippes.

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<sup>72</sup> Kendall to Cecil 2 March 1602, *HMCS*, 1602-03, vol. 12, pp. 67-68.

### The Appellant Controversy and the Spanish landing in Kinsale 1601

With the issue of the succession now undeniably looming, Cecil and his supporter Richard Bancroft, Bishop of London, made an effort to neutralise the threat to the state posed by the catholic minority in England, and at the same time, cause dissension within the ranks of the Jesuits, in order to minimise the catholic support for a catholic claimant to the throne backed by Spain.

During the last few years of Elizabeth's reign, there developed a deep theological and ideological split between different groups of English catholic clergy, one group primarily led by priests in England, many of them prisoners at Wisbech castle, and another led by their counterparts on the continent, in particular, the Jesuits headed by Father Robert Parsons. As Peter Lake and Michael Questier have explained, two of Parsons's books, *A Conference about the Next Succession* and *The Jesuit's memorial for the intended Reformation of England*, advocated binding all English catholics to the ideology of the Jesuits and maintaining a united front in support of the claim of the infanta.<sup>73</sup> To assure this, Parsons favoured the appointment of an Archpriest with authority over catholic priests in England; George Blackwell was chosen to fulfil the role. This did not sit well with a number of English priests, such as Christopher Bagshaw, William Clarke and Thomas Bluet, who rejected Parsons' interventions. In fact, they saw this as nothing other than an Hispanophile conspiracy, a Jesuit order backed and controlled by Spain to interfere with the English succession and which would ultimately lead to an English monarch being effectively controlled by Spain and their selected Jesuit advisors.<sup>74</sup>

This led the dissident priests of Wisbech, known as the Appellants, to appeal to Cecil and Bancroft to assist them in sending a delegation to Rome to block the appointment of Blackwell. Cecil and Bancroft saw this as an opportunity both to cause a damaging rift among the Jesuits

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<sup>73</sup> Peter Lake and Michael Questier, 'The Archpriest controversy and the issue of the succession', in Doran and Kewes (eds.), *Doubtful and Dangerous*, pp. 71-92, esp. pp. 71-74.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, pp. 74-77.



at a time when they needed to be united and to get those priests imprisoned in Wisbech to affirm their loyalty to the Crown, thus helping to secure James's succession when the time came.<sup>75</sup> Bancroft and Cecil's support for the Appellants were twofold. Firstly, they assisted the Appellants in organising and funding a third appeal to Rome (there had been two previous appeals in 1598 and 1600); the group carrying the appeal included the priest John Cecil, who had previously worked for Cecil and Burghley in the early 1590s. Secondly, Cecil and Bancroft helped sponsor and publish appellant tracts aimed at undermining Parsons.<sup>76</sup> Their plan was described by Sir Roger Wilbraham, solicitor-general for Ireland:

[T]he Bishop of London, on the advice of the Council, and, as he told me, especially the Secretary's [Cecil] advice, has worked to bring about the discord between the Jesuits and secular priests, whereby they have written divers railing quodlibets and pamphlets against one another, so that the treacherous purpose of the Jesuits to depose the queen as unlawful has appeared in their very writings.<sup>77</sup>

Cecil and Bancroft needed to find out whether their sponsored appeals and tracts were indeed causing disharmony amongst the Jesuit networks. Here Thomas Phelippes and his agent William Sterrell came to the fore.<sup>78</sup> Phelippes transmitted to Cecil the reports that Sterrel had been able to obtain of the meeting between the Appellants and the Jesuits in Rome. He sent Cecil three separate reports on 4 May, 4 June and 30 July 1602. These indicated that the Appellants were losing ground in their attempt to persuade the Pope to expel the Jesuits from England, in return for religious toleration of Catholics with England. But what was actually being achieved was that the tracts and books that Bancroft had allowed the Appellants to write and publish were causing a great deal of arguing and disruption, not just within the Jesuits'

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<sup>75</sup> Lake and Questier, 'The Archpriest controversy', pp. 82-84; Martin, *Elizabethan Espionage*, pp. 232-235.

<sup>76</sup> Martin, *Elizabethan espionage*, pp. 233-34; Lake and Questier, 'Appellant controversy', pp. 82-83.

<sup>77</sup> *The Journal of Sir Roger Wilbraham, solicitor-general in Ireland and master of requests, for the years 1593-1616*, Camden Third series, vol. 4, (December 1902), p 52-53.

<sup>78</sup> Martin, *Elizabethan Espionage*, p. 231.

ranks, but also between the Pope and the cardinals themselves.<sup>79</sup> Sterrell ended his 4 May report somewhat sceptical about the usefulness of going through all the effort of supporting the Appellants, when the appointment of a number of archbishops 'together with so many meetings, and travelling up and down of priests for election every year, would be more offensive to the [English] State than one poor quiet archpriest, who troubles no man'.<sup>80</sup> What Sterrell did not know was that it was not Bancroft and Cecil's intention to offer toleration for English catholic priests, secular or Jesuit, but to cause disharmony and to distract them from the issue of the English succession.

Predictably, the outcome of the Appellants' meetings with the cardinals in Rome went against them. This was communicated to Cecil by Sterrell, through Phelippes, on 21 August, that the Archpriest was to continue in his office and no other authority was to challenge him, the Jesuits in their European seminaries did not have to answer the charges of their English based colleagues, the appellants books and publications were to be banned and the appellants were not to bring any charges or question the authority of a seminary Jesuits in the future. .<sup>81</sup>

However, there was the consolation that they could govern themselves for the time being, before a more suitable archpriest was appointed sometime in the near future. This concession would have been inconsequential to Cecil and Bancroft as they had achieved their aims. Indeed, when James VI ascended to the English throne the year after, Bancroft would attribute the smooth succession to the catholics becoming divided so that 'there [would] be no opposition against [Elizabeth's] successor ... [If] the Jesuits without interruption had held on their course as they had begun [six years of struggle against the appellants], out of all question the Infanta would have grown exceeding strong in this realm by the time that her Majesty

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<sup>79</sup> *CSPD*, 1601-1603, vol. 284, pp. 184-86, 195-197, 227-228, 228-230.

<sup>80</sup> Sterrel to Phelippes? 4 May 1602, *CSPD*, 1601-1603, vol. 284, pp. 185-86.

<sup>81</sup> Notes [by Thomas Phelippes] of the proceedings at Rome 21 August/ 10 November 1602, SP 12/284 f.191r.

died'.<sup>82</sup> Thus Bancroft made sure that the new regime were aware of his involvement in securing their accession.

### The Spanish invasion of Ireland and the battle of Kinsale 1601

Cecil's eye had also been on the developments in Ireland, as throughout the 1590s Spanish armadas and rumours of them had always been rife. However, the Spanish force that landed in Kinsale in Ireland on 9 October 1601 was indeed no rumour. Neither, however, was it wholly unexpected and it did not cause of the sense of panic that the 'invisible armada' of 1599 or the previous 1596 and 1597 armada attempts had caused. It definitely did not surprise Cecil in fact, he seemed to have been expecting just such a venture, as his letter to Mountjoy, who had replaced Essex as lord deputy of Ireland, showed. Writing in 1600, he had assured Mountjoy that:

the Spaniards will not come unto you this yeare, for I have it from my owne, what their preparations are in all their parts, and what they can do ... they beareth up a reputation, by seeming to embrace more than they can gripe, but the next year [i.e. 1601] be assured they will cast over to you, some forlorne troops, which how they may be reinforced beyond their present abilitie, and his first intention, I cannot yet make any certaine judgement, but I believe out of my intelligence, that you may expect the landing in Munster, and the more to distract you in several places, as at Kings-sale [Kinsale], Beerehaven and Baltimore; where you may be sure coming from sea, they will first fortifie, and learne the streangth of the rebells [Tyrone's forces] before they dare take the field.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Martin, *Elizabethan espionage*, p. 247, note 97.

<sup>83</sup> James Caulfield (ed.), *Memoirs of Sir Robert Naunton, Author of 'The Fragmenta Regalia' with some of his posthumous writings* (London, 1814), pp. 104-105.

This was indeed true, judging by the intelligence that he had been receiving from Spain from his agents, including William Stallenge, who made no mention of fleets massing with the intention of sailing for Ireland.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, Andre Lopez Pinto, a Spanish merchant, reported that there were no preparations to send an army to attack England and an escaped prisoner, Thomas Saltern, who had been detained at A Coruña and Lisbon between February until July 1600, affirmed that: 'The Spaniards and Portuguese speak with contempt and reproach of their King, the captains and soldiers for want of pay, the merchants and commons as disliking his government' and that in terms of building a fleet they 'lacking carpenters, many [ships] were untrimmed and leaky'.<sup>85</sup> Even as early as August 1600, the lord admiral, Charles Howard, informed Cecil that: 'We have now received intelligences directly showing that there is no great likelihood of the Spaniards coming for Ireland'. But, he argued, they should still send out vessels to gather further intelligence to ensure that this was the case.<sup>86</sup>

By August 1601, Cecil had been receiving accurate intelligence reports on the number of soldiers that the Spanish were intending to send to Ireland. Thomas Phelippes and William Stallenge were all reporting that the Spanish were amassing a force of 5,000-6,000 men in the port of Lisbon and that this venture had been blessed by the Pope.<sup>87</sup> Phelippes attributed the low numbers to the outbreak of plague in Spain the previous year.<sup>88</sup> Cecil's intelligence was backed up by the reports that both Sir John Gilbert and Howard were receiving.<sup>89</sup> But what Cecil's intelligence could not tell him was the location where the Spanish would land. Nevertheless, his friend George Carew managed to break the Irish rebels' hold on Munster and captured the region's leaders, Desmond and Florence McCarthy, whom Carew sent to England to the Tower in August 1601 for Cecil to interrogate. In a letter to Carew, Cecil

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<sup>84</sup> William Stallenge to Cecil, 23 Sept 1600, *CSPD*, 1598-1601, vol. 275, pp. 468-69.

<sup>85</sup> Thomas Saltern to Cecil, 8 September 1600, *CSPD*, 1598-1601, vol. 275, p. 465, Andre Lopez Pinto to Cecil, 4 December 1600, *ibid*, p. 494.

<sup>86</sup> Charles Howard, Earl of Nottingham and Cecil to Sir Richard Lusson and Sir William Monson, Admirals of the Fleet, 29 August 1600, SP 12/275 f.84r.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas Phelippes to Cecil, 21 August 1601, SP 12/281 ff.114-115r-v; William Stallenge to Cecil, SP 12/281 f.171r.

<sup>88</sup> Thomas Phelippes to Cecil 26 September 1601, SP 12/281 f.186r.

<sup>89</sup> Sir John Gilbert, 22 September 1601, *CSPD*, 1601-1603, vol. 281, pp. 100, Charles Howard to Cecil, 23 September 1601, SP 12/281 ff. 188r, 189-190r-v.

informed his friend of the results of his interrogations of the two prisoners: 'Desmonde affirms that they [the Spanish] meant to come for Lymericke, but Florence would needs have it that they intended rather for Gallaway, wherein I assure you I ioyne with hym, being a place nearer to receave correspondency from the Rebels'.<sup>90</sup> This led Cecil to tend towards Galway as the most probably landing site, but the English were still unsure. The fact that both of the McCarthies had given different opinions suggested that not even Tyrone himself knew exactly where the Spanish were to land.

Even if Cecil's intelligence could not give him a definitive location as to where the Spanish would land, it did give him some idea of the locations where they *might* land, which was a markedly better scenario than in 1596 and 1597. What could not be in doubt was that the Spanish council of war saw the invasion of Ireland as a means of securing a launchpad to invade England in order to enforce their claims to the throne. Furthermore, such a successful invasion would put pressure on the English to move their troops in the Low Countries to Ireland, which would in turn weaken the Dutch. Ideologically, Philip III cared very much about assisting the catholic Irish against their English protestant overlords. Philip wanted the Pope's blessing to sanction a full-scale catholic uprising in Ireland with Spanish forces providing the backbone. Unhappily for Philip, he could not persuade the incumbent pope, Clement VIII, to support his invasion, as Clement had previously sought to free the papacy from Spanish influence by supporting Henry IV's conversion to catholicism.<sup>91</sup>

The invasion itself could more appropriately be called an expedition, as the original 6,000 men who had set sail actually totalled only 4,500, due to the storms causing a number of the transport ships to turn back home. The actual landing site was not decided upon until the fleet's departure. Setting out from Lisbon late in the campaigning season, on 3 September, was to prove costly, as the expedition's commander, Juan de Aguila, was forced to land at

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<sup>90</sup> Cecil to Sir George Carew, 5 September 1601, John Maclean (ed.), *Letters from Sir Robert Cecil to Sir George Carew*, Camden Society, no. 88 (London, 1864-65), pp. 92-93.

<sup>91</sup> Allen, *Pax Hispanica*, pp. 73-74.

Kinsale due to adverse winds and weather conditions.<sup>92</sup> All this meant that, if the Spanish themselves did not have a clear landing site in mind or, it seems, a clear strategy, Cecil and his agents could hardly be expected to find it out themselves. The best they could do was take an educated guess based on the geography of the island and the intelligence provided by sources such as the McCarthies.

As the English did not know exactly where the Spanish would land, therefore, when the landing came, Mountjoy was quick to gather up his forces and entrap Aquila in Kinsale castle on 4 November. Tyrone and his ally O'Donnell marched south to try and relieve Aquila, their plan being to attack the English forces besieging the castle whilst the Spanish simultaneously sallied out. The Irish forces were split between Tyrone and O'Donnell and totalled approximately 11,000 cavalry and infantry.<sup>93</sup> In a short but hard-fought contest lasting only two hours, Mountjoy was able to rout and smash the Irish forces who attacked disjointedly, with Aquila failing to sally out and support the Irish's attack. This resulted in Tyrone effectively losing his field army.<sup>94</sup> The ensuing siege of Kinsale lasted ten weeks, with Aquila being forced to surrender on 2 January 1602. With this, the Spanish intervention in Ireland ended, as did Philip III's hopes of using Ireland as a springboard to further his or his sister's claim on Elizabeth's throne.<sup>95</sup> In retrospect, the English were always well prepared for a Spanish invasion of Ireland and the fact that Cecil's agents could not pinpoint exactly where the Spanish would land had no effect on the outcome of the battle. The battle of Kinsale also provided a triumph for Cecil's intelligence network as his agents had given him very accurate numbers about the troops involved in the invasion as well as probable landing sites. It appeared that the years of setbacks and learning from past intelligence failures had finally

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p. 72; Frederick M Jones, 'The Spaniards and Kinsale 1601', *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, vol. 21, no. 1 (October, 1944), pp. 7-8.

<sup>93</sup> John McGurk, 'The Battle of Kinsale 1601', *History Ireland*, vol. 9, no. 3 (Autumn 2001), pp. 16-21, esp. p.18.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p. 19-20; Allen, *Pax Hispanica*, p. 75.

<sup>95</sup> McGurk, 'Battle of Kinsale', pp. 20-21; Allen, *Pax Hispanica*, pp. 75-76.

borne fruit, helping the English forces decisively shatter the rebels, and in doing so weakening Spain's ability to threaten the British Isles.

This victory also coincided with the siege of Ostend, which tied down a large number of the archduke's forces and thus meant that he would be unable to support a catholic candidate for the succession. Ostend, garrisoned by around 3,500 Dutch and English soldiers under the command of Sir Francis Vere was besieged by 20,000 Spanish; the siege began on 5 July 1601.<sup>96</sup> After repeated attacks by the Spanish were repulsed, disease started to take the greatest toll on both sides. As a result, Vere opened secret negotiations with the Spanish without informing the Dutch; unless the Dutch themselves sent reinforcements, he would surrender. This may have been a ploy by Vere, as the Dutch did send reinforcements. With the Dutch holding out well on their own, Vere left the siege, taking the majority of his men with him, although some remained until the conclusion of the siege on 20 December 1604, when the Dutch were forced to concede the town.<sup>97</sup> These two military engagements, Ostend and Kinsale, effectively tied down Spanish forces allowing Cecil to proceed with his plans to usher in James VI as Elizabeth's successor. With the Appellants causing a split within catholic ranks, Cecil and his supporters were able to manage events to secure a peaceful succession.

#### Cecil's role in securing James' accession

By the beginning of 1603 it was clear to the English privy council, but possibly not to the queen, that Cecil had firmly staked the succession, and indeed his own future, on James VI. There were, however, a number of steps that needed to be taken and which had to be well timed at the moment of Elizabeth's death, in order for James to succeed quickly and smoothly; any delay could allow a rival claimant to stake their claim or dispute James's right to the throne. A few months before Elizabeth's death, Cecil helped to draft a proclamation (31 January 1603)

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<sup>96</sup> Wernham, *Return of the Armadas*, pp. 369-70.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 382-85.

in which a number of catholic laymen being held in Wisbech signed an oath of allegiance to the queen, committing themselves to defend her 'if the Pope should excommunicate her and her adherents ... We would spend our blood in defence of Her Majesty, but lose our lives rather than infringe the authority of the Catholic Church'.<sup>98</sup> The word 'adherents' was a clever insertion by Cecil as this would bind those that signed the proclamation to support the next monarch that, as the queen's adherents, Cecil and the privy council would choose. The document acknowledged that Cecil and Bancroft could not completely sever the secular priests from their loyalty to the catholic church, but this would be good enough to ensure their compliance when the time came for James to take the throne. The second clause of the proclamation included the phrase 'many conspiracies having been made of late years against her person and realm, on pretence of restoring the catholic religion', a reference to the plots and armada attempts which punctuated the 1590s, to firmly remind the priests that the machinations of their colleagues on the continent hung over them.<sup>99</sup>

The binding of the obedience of the secular catholic priests could not have been better timed, as the queen's health steadily declined in February and early March 1603. She eventually died on the morning of 24 March 1603, at Richmond Palace.<sup>100</sup> Four days beforehand, Cecil and the privy council had issued a proclamation ordering all the barons and Earls within the vicinity of London and fifty miles beyond to assemble at court. This was intended to ensure that the privy council could control and keep an eye on any magnates who might have caused any trouble to the succession, and to make sure that they could vocally and physically be present to give their support to James when Cecil proclaimed him king.<sup>101</sup> As soon as Elizabeth had died, Cecil and the privy council swiftly put their preparations into action. Firstly, a proclamation was read out by the mayor of London declaring James VI King James I King of England and detailing his right and lineage to the crown, being 'derived of the body of Margret [Tudor],

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<sup>98</sup> Declaration by the secular priests, 31 January 1603, *CSPD*, 1601-1603, vol. 287, pp. 285-86.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, *CSPD*, 1601-1603, vol. 287, pp. 285-86.

<sup>100</sup> Questier, *Dynastic Politics*, p. 269; Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, pp. 377-383.

<sup>101</sup> John Roche Dasent (ed.), *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, new series, vol. 32, (London, 1907), pp. 493-94.



daughter of ... henrie the seventh ... the said lady Margret being begotten of the body of Elizabeth, daughter to King Edward the fourth ... the same lady Margret being also the eldest sister of henry the eight, of famous memorie king of England aforsayd'; tactfully no mention was made of James's mother, Mary Queen of Scots.<sup>102</sup> Secondly, on 5 April, Cecil and the privy council drew up and signed a document allowing them to retain their offices whilst the transfer of power to James was effected. This allowed them both to secure their positions of power and influence for the present and to ensure that their authority, which technically expired with the late queen, was continued to prevent any interruption in the succession.<sup>103</sup>

As soon as Elizabeth had died, the courtier Sir Robert Carey had, on a previously agreed signal by Cecil, slipped out; he managed to out-ride the official royal messenger, and arrived in Edinburgh three days later to tell James the news of the queen's death, and that he was indeed her successor.<sup>104</sup> In response, James quickly wrote a letter to Cecil congratulating him on a smooth 'translation of a monarchy' and saying that he hoped that God would make him 'equal and answerable to that place your state has called us unto'. By 5 April, James had left Edinburgh to ride in triumph to London, taking in the adulation and pledges of loyalty from his new subjects as he went.<sup>105</sup> Cecil himself had written to James on 25 March, asking him to take my 'sincere and undivided service unto my present mistress [Elizabeth], an argument of my future fidelity unto yourselfe' and assuring James that 'it was an universall assent of all, that gave this speedy and dutifull passage unto your Ma[jesty's] rightful clayme'.<sup>106</sup> He doubted 'not but youre ma[jesty] shall in your service aknowlegde me, to be a member of that howse w[hi]ch hath yet never been unfaithfull to their maisters', unlike, that is, treasonous members of families such as the Percies and Howards.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Printed copy of the proclamation by the Mayor of London and the privy council declaring James King of England, 24 March 1603, SP 14/187/ f.6r-v; Questier, *Dynastic politics*, p. 269; Croft, *King James*, p. 48.

<sup>103</sup> Proclamation for the persons in office, at the death of Queen Elizabeth, to continue therein, SP 14/73 ff. 12-13r-v.

<sup>104</sup> Croft, *King James*, p. 49; Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, pp. 386-87.

<sup>105</sup> Akrigg, *Letters of King James VI and I*, pp. 208-09; Croft, *King James*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>106</sup> Cecil to King James I, 25 March 1603, SP14/1 f.6r.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, SP14/1 f.6r.

By 15 April, Cecil had travelled up to York to meet with his new master face to face. He also made sure to write a carefully worded letter to Queen Anne, extolling his 'thanks that it hath pleased you to number me amongst your humble servants', and assuring her that he would do all he could to be worthy of the favour that she had extended to him in her previous letter to him.<sup>108</sup>

With the favour of both the new king and queen assured, Cecil set about securing the realm for James's safe passage to London. There were various proclamations ordering vagabonds and rogues about the city of London to be rounded up and then to be sent to the Low Countries to serve the state. Additionally, the city watch was put on high alert, and suspected papists were also imprisoned in case they caused disturbances to hinder James's triumphal march south.<sup>109</sup> Henry Percy, ninth Earl of Northumberland, wrote secretly to James, assuring him that all was being done to make sure that catholics were being kept under control and that none seriously disputed his accession except for:

Sr Edward Bemanne [Baynham], a wyld and fre speaking youthe, who brauing it, and protesting that he wold loose his lyfe, and so wold 40,000 Catholikes more, ere your Maiesty should comme in, this man is committed to prison, and I assure your Maiesty condemned by all of them [the Catholics], ore the most pairt, that are Catholiklye affected, unles it be by some of them that are puritane papistes that thirst after a spanish tytyle.<sup>110</sup>

Indeed, those papists who did 'thirst after a Spanish tytyle' were astonished at the speed with which James was proclaimed and his title secured, most of all Robert Parsons, who was 'struck dead' at the news of James' proclamation. After he had regained his composure he reflected that the coronation was inevitable: 'the joining of two kingdoms does not a little

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<sup>108</sup> Queen Anne to Cecil 15 April 1603, CSPD, James I, March-May 1603, vol. 148, p. 5; Cecil to Queen Anne, May 1603, SP 14/1 f.255r.

<sup>109</sup> APC, vol. 32, 1601-1604 p. 491.

<sup>110</sup> John Bruce (ed.), *Correspondence of King James of Scotland with Sir Robert Cecil and Others in England*, Camden Society 78, first series, (1861), pp. 73-74.

content them [the English catholics] and, besides this, they persuade themselves with diverse reasons that it cannot go so bad with them under this man as before under the queen'.<sup>111</sup>

In Spain, Philip III and his council were still considering a plan to allow the English catholics to choose their own candidate and that candidate in turn would have the backing of Spain, France and the Pope. Even after James's accession proclamation, on 22 March 1603, Philip wistfully ordered 1.3 million ducats to be put aside to finance any action against England or to be used to bribe Scottish and Irish catholics to rebel against James; but ultimately, this was money that he did not have and in reality his only option was to congratulate the new King.<sup>112</sup> Certainly, the final nail in any Spanish aspirations for the English throne ended when the infanta herself ordered the Spanish ambassador to the Low Countries on 16 April 1603 'to lose no time in cultivating him [James] ... For by joining together England and Scotland, and joined by Denmark through his father-in-law, he will be lord of the Ocean; and for this reason and others his friendship will always be a good thing to have'.<sup>113</sup> For the infanta and her husband, the archduke, the priority had always been to end the war with England as quickly as possible and this overriding factor made any attempt to support her candidacy a fruitless task from the very start.

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<sup>111</sup> Thomas Graves Law (ed.), *The Archpriest Controversy*, 2 vols, Camden Society, second series, 56, 58, 1896, 1898, vol. 2, p. 241; Questier, *Dynastic Politics*, pp. 269-70.

<sup>112</sup> Allen, *Pax Hispanica*, pp. 103-107.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 108-09.

## Conclusion

As Cecil was slowly and solemnly walking in his allotted place behind the queen's funeral cortege on Thursday 28 April 1603, he must have allowed himself a satisfied smile as all his labours and plans conceived during the past three years had come to fruition.<sup>114</sup> With Essex gone, he was able to become James' primary means of securing his succession and with his supporters in all the key positions, both in the military and bureaucracy, he was able to ensure that this was the case. The Spanish expedition to Kinsale in October 1601 had allowed Mountjoy finally to smash the rebel Tyrone's field army once and for all, thus securing Ireland and ending any chance of the Spanish gaining a foothold in the British isles. Through his intelligence networks, Cecil knew that the archduke's forces were bogged down in the siege of Ostend and therefore could not hope to challenge militarily James's candidacy and support that of his wife. Indeed, through his and Bancroft's machinations with the Appellants, a united Jesuit front for a catholic candidate was removed at a time when the queen's health was starting to seriously fade.

It would be easy then to attribute Cecil's choreographing of James's succession as down to luck and indeed it must be acknowledged there was certainly some good fortune involved. This, however, is too simplistic, as it neglects the careful planning, organising and cajoling that went on behind the scenes, in making sure that James succeeded to a throne that was not beset by intrigue, civil war and foreign invasion. James himself had also played his own part in this smooth succession; he had firstly managed to make the Jesuits and catholic powers believe that he might actually convert to Catholicism, and thus managed to garner favourable relations with them, and secondly, he followed Cecil's advice and remained on good terms with Elizabeth for the last few years of her life so that she did nothing that could be construed to block his candidacy.<sup>115</sup> But it was to Cecil that the majority of the credit should go, as he had proven himself to be an able and adept politician, in being able to seamlessly transition

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<sup>114</sup> Draft of the ceremonial of the funeral procession of Queen Elizabeth from the Palace of Whitehall, SP 14/1 96r; Guy, *The Forgotten Years*, pp. 388-391.

<sup>115</sup> Allen, *Pax Hispanica*, pp. 106-07; Croft, *King James*, pp. 52-53.

from a Tudor to a Stuart monarchy. He was duly rewarded with a continued position as principal secretary and his creation as Baron Essendon on 13 May 1603.<sup>116</sup> It was due to his foresight and ability to work with and alongside monarchs, privy councillors, mayors, lord lieutenants and clergymen and to bring all these different personalities and interests together to ensure that what could have been a chaotic, doubtful and dangerous succession, was anything but.

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<sup>116</sup> Creation of Sir Robert Cecil to the rank of Baron Essendon in the county of Rutland, 13 May 1603, SP 14/41 f.9r; Cecil to Hicke 10 September 1603, Lansdowne MSS, vol. 88, f.153r.

## Chapter 7: Sir Robert Cecil's Methodology as an Intelligencer

This final, predominantly thematic, chapter will examine and discuss the methodology of Sir Robert Cecil's intelligence network by making comparisons with other noted intelligencers of the period: Sir Francis Walsingham; Cecil's father Lord Burghley; and his rival in the intelligence-gathering sphere, the Earl of Essex. This comparison will be made to assess the aspects of these other intelligence-gathering networks that were incorporated into Cecil's own and how, if at all, his practice differed from those mentioned above. Despite the interest in Elizabethan intelligencing this sort of systematic comparison has not previously been made by historians. It will provide two valuable insights: firstly, it will show that there was a continuity in the means by which intelligence was gathered. Secondly, and most importantly, it will enable an overall assessment to be made of Cecil's effectiveness as an intelligencer.

The chapter will also be concerned with the role of the principal secretary, as the attainment of this powerful office enabled the holder to construct a more effective and well-funded intelligence-gathering network. It also allowed the incumbent greater access to the monarch and also significantly increased his standing at court. Additionally, the working habits of Walsingham and Burghley will be analysed alongside Cecil's in order to determine any patterns in their working habits. A.G.R Smith's article on the secretariat of the Cecils has looked in depth at Burghley and Cecil, but he did not look at Walsingham in any great detail, which is surprising given that he was also principal secretary, and must have had some influence on Cecil when he attained the post himself, in July 1596.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to understand how Elizabethans, indeed how Elizabethan spies themselves, viewed espionage and the profession of spying. Nicholas Berden, a spy working for Walsingham in the 1580s, said of his role as a spy: 'This only I Crave that though I professe

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<sup>1</sup> A.G.R. Smith, 'The Secretariats of the Cecils', c.1580-1612, *EHR*, vol. 83, no. 328 (July 1968), pp. 481-504.

myself a Spye (which is a profession odious though necessary) that I prosecute the same not for gayne, butt for the Saffetie of my Naty[ve] Countrie'.<sup>2</sup> This suggests that spies themselves were consciously aware of the stigma that surrounded their profession. This, however, did not stop important political figures such as Walsingham, Burghley, Cecil and Essex, looking beyond the social stigma to see the advantages that could be gained by employing these agents to infiltrate places where the official diplomat could not. It must also be said that the likes of Walsingham and Cecil also used the means of gathering intelligence to further their own political careers by using such successes to reinforce their importance to the queen and their role in safeguarding the realm and her person. Indeed, Alford notes that 'there were no structures to allow for removing the careful assessment of intelligence from the making of policy, and little hope of keeping the business of gathering intelligence free of the politics of Elizabeth I's court and Council. Espionage was a political activity'.<sup>3</sup> This is certainly true of the Earl of Essex, who gathered intelligence, especially from Spain, to justify his aggressive war policy against Philip II to Elizabeth.<sup>4</sup> Consequentially, this endorses Dickinson's viewpoint, that Elizabeth I should be put back into the heart of the decision making process, as without the queen's approval, or at least quiet consent, Essex or Cecil's intelligence-gathering networks would not have flourished.<sup>5</sup>

#### From Walsingham to Cecil: a disjointed transition

During the 1580s, Sir Francis Walsingham had almost entirely dominated the intelligence-gathering sphere. Through his team of secretaries, specialists and agents, Walsingham had been able to thwart England's enemies at almost every turn, and had even connived with

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<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Berden to Thomas Phelippes? 7 July 1586, SP 12/167 f.3, printed in J.H. Pollen and William MacMahon (ed.), *The Venerable Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel 1557-1595*, CRS, 21 (London, 1919), pp. 88-89.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Alford, 'Spies in the Office of Sir Francis Walsingham', in Robyn Adams and Rosanna Cox (eds.), *Diplomacy and Early Modern Culture* (London, 2011), p. 48.

<sup>4</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, pp. 187-190.

<sup>5</sup> Dickinson, *Court Politics*, pp. 120-21.

Burghley to orchestrate the downfall of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587. His death in April 1590 led to a period of uncertainty in the field of intelligence-gathering between 1590 to 1597. This left Burghley, Cecil and Essex each in turn trying to fill the political vacuum which was caused by Walsingham's death, before Cecil finally established his own dominance in this sphere.

There should at this stage be a distinction made between an observer and an agent, although in the sources the distinction between the two are not made clear. An observer can be classed as a person such as Giles van Harwick, whose role was primarily to note down or find out information on fleet numbers, movements of ships and men, likely destinations for the Spanish fleets and so on. He had not been asked to infiltrate a group or institution such as the Jesuits. Harwick seems to have gleaned his information from his contacts made within the city of Lisbon and not by any means of covert infiltration on his part. An agent was someone like William Sterrell or John Cecil. These men were asked to ingratiate themselves into an enemy party such as the regiment of Sir William Stanley or the English catholic emigres based in Paris. Both types of information gathering were important as the two sources combined helped to give Cecil an overall picture of the enemy's activity and potential plans.

Starting with Walsingham's intelligence network, which he had built up during the 1570s and 80s, there are many similarities with Cecil's own intelligence network. The geographical distribution of their respective networks can be analysed by comparing the documents entitled 'The names of sundrie forren places from whence Mr Secretary Walsingham was want to receaue his advertisements' and the three documents dating from Cecil's time as secretary: 'A list of certain intelligencers', 'A memorial of intelligencers in several places' and 'Intelligencers imployed abroad'. The two men had many agents reporting from the same locations, such as the coastal port cities of Lisbon, Bayonne, St Sebastian, alongside the cities of Rouen, Brussels and Madrid. However, Walsingham's intelligence network, taken from



these documents, was clearly more comprehensive. Walsingham had more agents in France, the German States and in the Ottoman empire.<sup>6</sup>

This can be attributed to the different circumstances in which Walsingham's and Cecil's intelligence systems operated. By Cecil's time, the threat from France was greatly diminished, as the Wars of Religion were more or less over due to the succession of Henry IV as King of France in 1594, who in turn became an ally of Elizabeth against Spain. There had also been the threat, as Walsingham and Burghley saw it, from Mary, Queen of Scots, whose claim had been supported by the Guise family from France. Therefore, Walsingham had to concentrate his agents in France. In a similar way, Cecil placed his agents keeping a close eye on Brussels, Spain and Rome in response to the plots of 1594 and 1595. In this respect, Cecil followed Walsingham's mantra of keeping a wide-ranging intelligence-gathering network across Europe to cover as many avenues of interest as possible. However, Cecil kept a Eurocentric approach, as he did not cover the near east in as much detail as Walsingham had done before him.

This broadly similar approach of both Walsingham and Cecil contrasted with that of Lord Burghley. After Walsingham's death in April 1590, as we saw in chapter three, Burghley decided to drastically cut back on the number of agents on the payroll. By May, Burghley, alongside Sir Thomas Heneage, had drawn up an audit of Walsingham's former agents to assess if they were to be kept in place, to be discarded or have their pay reduced. The agents who were retained included: Chasteau-Martin, who worked alongside English traders at Bayonne; Stephen de Rorque, who worked in Lisbon; Edmund Palmer, placed in Saint-Jean-de-Luz; whilst Filiazzi kept tabs on the Duke of Florence and Alexander de la Torre, who had moved from Antwerp to Rome in February 1590.<sup>7</sup> These were by no means the only agents that Walsingham had employed during his tenure, given the extensive range of countries

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<sup>6</sup> 'The names of sundrie forren places from whence Mr Secretary Walsingham was want to receaue his advertisements' 7? May 1590, SP12/232 f.20r-v, in comparison with 'List of certain intelligencers', 1597/1598?, SP12/265 f.134r; 'A memorial of Intelligencers in several places' 1598, SP 12/265 f.204r-v and 'Intelligencers imployed abroade this yeare' 1601, SP 12/283 f.176r-v.

<sup>7</sup> Alford, *The Watchers*, p. 264; 'Names of intelligencers', April 1590, SP 101/90 f.84r.

covered within the 'names of sundrie forren places', so there must have been many more agents on the payroll during Burghley's audit.

In comparison to Cecil and Walsingham's networks, Burghley's intelligence-gathering network was small but crucially it was cost-effective. Burghley may have thought that the threat from Spain was lessened by the defeat of the 1588 Armada and therefore a sizeable intelligence network was no longer needed.<sup>8</sup> However, as previously discussed, Burghley and Heneage still retained some of Walsingham's more active agents, most notably Robert Poley and Michael Moody. Although comparing places from where Cecil, Walsingham and Burghley received their intelligence is useful, it does not tell us the methods that they used to acquire this information. Each man's methods can tell us a lot about how and why they created, or in Burghley's case scaled back, their respective intelligence networks.

A further point of comparison can be seen with Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex. Even though he did not himself become principal secretary he nevertheless, as Paul Hammer has highlighted, oversaw the creation of his own sizeable intelligence-gathering network during the years 1593 to 1597.<sup>9</sup> This is even more remarkable as he had only his personal funds to maintain a network, which encompassed parts of Germany, Italy, Poland, Scotland and France.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Sebastian Sobecki has noted that Cecil's coverage within Central Europe was patchy and he employed John Peyton, who was travelling around central Europe during the mid-1590s, to send him information on the important families and the political situation within Germany and Poland.<sup>11</sup> It is not possible to conduct a financial comparison between Essex's and Cecil's networks as Essex, perhaps sensibly, disguised or concealed the payments that he made to his spies. The only obvious reference found by Hammer was £5

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<sup>8</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, pp. 154-5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pp. 152-198..

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp. 154, 163-64, 173, 178, 180-87.

<sup>11</sup> Sebastian Sobecki, 'A man of curious enquiry': John Peyton's Grand Tour to central Europe and Robert Cecil's intelligence network, 1596-1601', *Renaissance Studies*, vol. 29, no. 3, (June, 2015), pp. 394-410.

paid, in 1595, to one Thomas Cload who was employed in Spain, but left no other trace.<sup>12</sup> In spite of this, by looking at both Essex's and Cecil's networks we can see both similarities and differences in terms of the methods that they used.

Essex had actually stolen a march on the Cecils during the early to mid-1590s. Burghley's cost-cutting had allowed Essex, with the help of Anthony Bacon who organised his intelligence network, to step in and fill in this vacuum.<sup>13</sup> As Cecil and Burghley began employing their own agents during 1593-94, most notably Robert Poley, Richard Chomley and John Cecil, their main focus during the early to mid-1590s had been on Scotland and Ireland, leaving Essex free to seek agents in Italy, France and Germany.<sup>14</sup> Robert Poley in particular was used by Walsingham, Burghley and Cecil as a message courier. His important task was to ensure that letters were delivered into the hands of their intended recipients and that their replies were safely delivered back to his master. His destinations varied from the court of James VI of Scotland, Brussels, Antwerp, the Hague and Bayonne.<sup>15</sup> Cecil made use of Poley from at least March 1596, and kept him in his employ up until September 1601, when he sent him to Paris with letters from King James VI of Scotland for the resident English ambassador, Sir Ralph Winwood.<sup>16</sup>

A few of Walsingham's former agents who were rejected by Burghley had no choice but to seek employment with Essex, as he made it known that he was interested in creating his own intelligence-gathering network. Thomas Phelippes was another ex-Walsingham secretary who failed to obtain Burghley's patronage and therefore, alongside another ex-Walsingham agent William Sterrell, ingratiated themselves into Essex's service. However, after a few unsuccessful missions in Flanders, Essex lost both trust and patience in Phelippes and Sterrell, as his reputation with the queen and his purse suffered. By 1595, Phelippes was finished in

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pp. 153-154.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pp. 154-55; Alford, *The Watchers*, chapters 18 and 19.

<sup>14</sup> Acres, 'Sir Robert Cecil', chapter 1.

<sup>15</sup> Eugénie De Kalb, 'Robert Poley's Movements as a Messenger of the Court, 1588 to 1601', *Review of English Studies*, vol. 9, no 33, (January 1933), pp. 13-18.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, pp. 17-18.

Essex's service and he gradually gravitated towards Cecil, especially after his appointment to the secretaryship.<sup>17</sup>

There were also significant differences between Cecil's and Essex's intelligence networks in the countries from which they were receiving their information. Essex's network primarily relied upon Anthony Bacon's contacts from his travels abroad and therefore he had a number of agents in France, Italy, Flanders, Scotland and Germany.<sup>18</sup> A significant weakness of Essex's network, however, was that he was not receiving information from countries such as the Low Countries and Spain from where plots were originating, whereas Cecil had numerous agents in these countries.<sup>19</sup> Essex did not, moreover, have as much success as Cecil in Spain and in infiltrating Jesuit seminaries; he did not have an agent the equivalent of William Resolde or John Cecil.<sup>20</sup> Essex also relied upon information gained from young aristocratic men whom he sponsored to gain an education and experiences abroad. Cecil and Burghley had also done this but the types of men they sent over were those who had aspirations of pursuing a career in the bureaucracy or the governmental posts of the Elizabethan state.<sup>21</sup>

The use of merchant ships was just as important to Essex's intelligence network as it was for Cecil's. Just as Robert Cecil had the Honiman brothers and Horatio Palavicino, so Essex made use of his own merchants. Traders such as Thomas Marchant and Nicholas Le Blanc, financed by Essex, set up work as merchants in various Spanish ports: Marchant settled in San Sebastian, whilst Le Blanc chose Seville as his base.<sup>22</sup> It is obvious through Hammer's analysis of Essex's intelligence network that even though it had its short-comings, it did initially

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<sup>17</sup> Alford, *The Watchers*, pp. 285-297; Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, pp.152-154, 163.

<sup>18</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, pp. 165-170, 179-187.

<sup>19</sup> 'Intelligencers employed abroad this yeare' 1601 SP 12/283, f.176r-v.

<sup>20</sup> John Cecil [alias Snowden] to Cecil, 30? December 1595, *CSPD*, 1595-1597, vol. 255, pp. 144-46; *CSPD*, 1598-1601, vols 266-67, pp. 9, 25, 41, 43-44, 55-56, 65-66.

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Williamson, 'Fishing after News' and the Ars Apodemica: The Intelligencing Role of the Educational Traveller in the Late Sixteenth Century Chapter Authors', in Joad Raymond and Noah Moxham (eds.) *News Networks in Early Modern Europe Book* (Brill, 2016), pp. 153, 546-47, 556-57; Hammer, 'Essex and Europe: evidence from continental instructions by the Earl of Essex', *EHR*, 1996, pp. 357-81.

<sup>22</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, pp. 188-89; Albert J. Loomie, *The Spanish Elizabethans: the English Exiles at the Court of Phillip II* (Fordham, 1963), p. 65.

gain him the political clout he wanted when he presented intelligence about plots and Spanish aggression to Elizabeth.<sup>23</sup>

Hammer has also pointed out there was a great deal of cooperation between Essex and the Cecils in the intelligence gathering sphere.<sup>24</sup> I would argue that, along with the spate of plots during 1593, 1594 and 1595, Essex's success in his intelligence-gathering activities made the Cecils (especially Robert Cecil) switch their focus from Scotland and Ireland to the continent to try to keep up with Essex. This new assertiveness in intelligence gathering by Cecil was greatly enhanced when he obtained the principal secretaryship. By 1597, with the finances and the political prestige that came with the post, coupled with Essex's return to military campaigning from 1596 onwards, Cecil increasingly monopolised the intelligence-gathering sphere.<sup>25</sup>

### Secretarial Staff

Another good indication of the four men's different methods can be deduced by looking at the composition of their secretariats. A.G. R Smith's article on the secretariat of the Cecils has demonstrated big differences between Cecil and Burghley's secretariats, not least because of their size. Only five men served in Burghley's secretariat between 1580-1598, whilst his son had eleven different men serving him between 1594-1612.<sup>26</sup> Important for this study are the number and social identity of the men whom Burghley and Cecil picked to see to their foreign and intelligence correspondence.<sup>27</sup> Throughout his career in high office, Burghley had relied heavily on Henry Maynard to look after his foreign correspondence. This correspondence included the dispatches from the English ambassadors and agents from all over Europe.<sup>28</sup> This inevitably put a huge workload onto one man, but since Burghley was himself a

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<sup>23</sup> Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, pp. 159-162.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, pp.194-95.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 197-98.

<sup>26</sup> A.G.R. Smith, 'The Secretariats of the Cecils', pp. 481-82.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 481-82, 483-4, 492, 493-4.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 492.

conservative and tended to stick with men whom he had built up a long-lasting working relationship with, this resulted in Burghley's secretariat rarely changing in terms of personnel or duties.<sup>29</sup>

Cecil had a different approach, in that instead he chose to employ men who had experience of living on the continent and of worldly affairs. These included men such as Simon Willis, who looked after intelligence-gathering matters, and Levinus Munck, who dealt with foreign affairs, such as letters from foreign ambassadors; these two men worked in tandem and at times crossed over.<sup>30</sup> Simon Willis had joined Cecil's secretariat in 1595. His work included corresponding with agents such as George Nicolson, who had intelligence of the Scottish borders and Ireland. He also worked on the interrogations in the wake of Essex's rebellion in 1601, and the handling of the letters of Thomas Harrison, a former Walsingham agent who wanted to plant an agent in the seminary of Douai.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately for Willis, after several years, Cecil came to distrust him and he was dismissed in 1602. This was because Cecil had feared that Willis was going to betray him to the queen over his secret correspondence with James VI.<sup>32</sup> He explained further to Sir Henry Wotton, English ambassador to Venice, why he had been removed:

partly for his pride ... but [also] principally because I was loath he should have come to some discovery of that correspondency which I had with the King our souveraigne, which, without great difficulty, I could not have avoided, considering his daily and neare attendance as my secretary, to whose eyes a pacquett or a paper might have beene so visible as he mought have rayseed some such inferences thereof, as mought have bred some jealousy in the

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid, p. 484.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, pp. 493-4.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Thompson to Mr Willis or Mr Levinus, [8 Feb] 1601, *HMCS*, 1601, vol. 11, pp. 33-34; [Cecil] to [George] Nicholson, 19 Dec 1601, *HMCS*, 1601, vol. 11, pp. 524-526; Thomas Harrison to Simon Willis, 9/21 Feb 1599, same to the same, 28 Feb 1599, *HMCS*, 1599, vol. 9, 1599, pp. 76-77, 84-99; Thomas Harrison to Lord Cobham, 14 March 1599, *CSPD* 1598-1601, vol. 268, p. 168.

<sup>32</sup> A.G.R. Smith, 'The Secretariats of the Cecils', p. 502-503.

Queen's mynd, yf she had knowne it or heard of any such suspicion to move from him.<sup>33</sup>

Willis was replaced by Thomas Wilson, who, from 1609, was to work alongside Levinus Munck, who had taken on the intelligence side of Cecil's secretariat when Willis had been sacked. Munck came from the Netherlands and had entered Cecil's service in 1596, where he had gradually become more and more involved in both Cecil's foreign and intelligence correspondence. This may have especially been the case after 1600 when, presumably, Cecil's suspicions of Willis had been growing.<sup>34</sup> The system that Cecil had put in place by 1596 was that agents abroad, such as Thomas Harrison, would direct their letters to a merchant, such as Thomas Honiman, who would then carry their letters by sea and deliver them to either Willis/Wilson or Munck, who would then hand them over to Cecil for scrutiny. More generally, it was either Willis or Munck who would either answer the correspondence if their master was away or forward important intelligence, as they deemed it, to Cecil where his attention was especially needed. They must have acted as a form of quality control.<sup>35</sup>

This demonstrated that Cecil had a different mindset from his father when it came to the delegation of the enormous workload that came with the principal secretaryship. Burghley only trusted a select few to handle his correspondence. Cecil had no such inclinations, especially as by 1600 onwards he was to be given more and more offices which increased his workload and thus he was forced to delegate. It must also be pointed out that Cecil did not have a privy councillor of equivalent standing who could assist him nor did he have a rival who had the same administrative skills as he himself possessed, as Burghley and Walsingham had done for each other. This meant that he often had to delegate the overall running of his intelligence networks to his two secretaries in foreign affairs, Munck and Willis. It was these two secretaries whom Cecil relied upon, until Willis's dishonourable dismissal, to manage the day to day

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<sup>33</sup> Sir Henry Sydney, *Letters and Memorials of State, collected by Arthur Collins* (London, 1746, 2 vols) vol. 2, p. 326.

<sup>34</sup> A.G.R. Smith, 'The Secretariats of the Cecils', pp. 495-496.

<sup>35</sup> Draft by Munck of letters to Cornwallis, English ambassador at Madrid 1605-9, SP 94/10 f.97r-v; SP 94/11 ff. 152r-156r.

workings of his intelligence network and their importance cannot be overstated. Munck, in particular due to his longer service, received the bulk of incoming reports and had to personally manage the various agents at Cecil's disposal.

Cecil must have taken some inspiration from Sir Francis Walsingham in how he chose to organise both his secretariat and his intelligence-gathering network. This was because he had done some work abroad for Walsingham when he had been sent to France in 1584. Furthermore, after Walsingham's death, the Cecils had gathered up Walsingham's papers for their own use and, theoretically at least, Cecil may have used these Walsingham papers when he himself became principal secretary as a form of template for starting up his own intelligence-gathering network. Furthermore, once he had become principal secretary, Cecil utilised the services of one Robert Proby, who had offered to survey and gather together Walsingham's books and papers, especially those on Ireland and France.<sup>36</sup> In October 1597, once catalogued by Proby, John James and Thomas Lake, joint keepers of the state papers, moved Walsingham's papers from Seething Lane to Whitehall. Then, in 1610, Thomas Wilson, Cecil's recently appointed foreign papers secretary, moved the papers to rooms near the old Banqueting House at Whitehall, and divided the papers under the two headings, domestic and foreign.<sup>37</sup> This meant that Cecil had regular access to Walsingham's old papers and therefore he must have drawn influence from them.

Likewise, in the composition of his secretariat, Walsingham had employed a number of secretaries to help him with the different aspects of his correspondence. His main secretary was initially Robert Beale until 1572, when he left to serve as clerk of the privy council. Beale was replaced by Lawrence Tomson in 1573 and, underneath him as the second secretary, there was Francis Mylles, whose main responsibility was for Walsingham's intelligence correspondence. Mylles was also joined by Nicholas Faunt in 1578 and by the cipher specialist

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<sup>36</sup> Hsuan-Ying Tu, 'The Pursuit of God's Glory: Francis Walsingham's Espionage in Elizabethan Politics, 1568-1588' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 2012), pp. 21, 25.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 27-28.



Thomas Phelippes in 1578, who became much more prominent during the mid-1580s. Another specialist was Arthur Gregory, an expert in opening letters and forging seals.<sup>38</sup>

Cecil's inclination to appoint lower born, specialised secretaries mirrors the approach that Walsingham took when creating his own secretariat. Cecil must have seen how Walsingham turned his London house, in Seething Lane, into the hub for his efficient intelligence operations and must have wanted to emulate him. Indeed, a number of Walsingham's employees transferred their loyalties to the Cecils once their master had died. These included Nicholas Faunt, who was appointed Clerk of the Signet in 1595, and had been given a lease of archiepiscopal lands for twenty-one years in 1600, and Arthur Gregory, who served Robert Cecil until 1596, performing much the same role as he had done for Walsingham.<sup>39</sup> Some of Walsingham's spies also worked for Cecil: Robert Poley in the Netherlands; John Mychell, who was used by Walsingham in Italy after the 1588 armada; Geoffrey Davis, who had been used by Walsingham in Spain; and John Owen who was introduced to Cecil in August 1601 by Cobham and Henry Seymour.<sup>40</sup>

Probably the most important recruit from the former Walsingham era was Thomas Phelippes, an expert in decoding ciphers. Born in 1556 to William Phillips, a cloth merchant and a customs officer for wool in London, and his wife Joan, who was a daughter of Thomas Houghton. He entered Trinity College, Cambridge in 1569, earning his BA and MA. There he also learnt a range of different languages including French, Italian, German and Spanish. He had become central to Walsingham's intelligence network by the mid-1580s, working alongside his patron to stop the Throckmorton plot in 1583, and to bring about the downfall and execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587. Throughout his life he had almost always been heavily in debt; he

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<sup>38</sup> Hsuan-Ying Tu, 'The Pursuit of God's Glory', pp. 79-80.

<sup>39</sup> Birch, *Memoirs*, p. 13; Arthur Gregory to Cecil, 12 Oct 1594, *HMCS*, 1594-95, vol. 5, p. 5; same to the same, 28 Feb 1595, *HMCS*, 1594-95, vol. 5, pp. 126-127, same to the same, 1 August 1596, *HMCS*, 1596, vol. 6, p. 310, same to the same, 17 Sept 1596, *HMCS*, 1596, vol. 6, pp. 388-389; same to the same, Sept 1596, *ibid*, p. 410.

<sup>40</sup> Hsuan-Ying Tu, 'The Pursuit of God's Glory', p. 319; John Mychell to Cecil, 11 Oct 1596, *HMCS*, 1596, vol. 6, p. 426; William Borough to Cecil, 27 October 1596, *HMC*, 1596, vol. 6, p. 457; John Owen to Cecil, August 1601, *HMCS*, 1601, vol. 11, p. 371; Alford, *The Watchers*, p. 317.

owed the crown as much as £10,000, and this, coupled with his sporadic employment as an intelligencer, landed him in prison on a number of occasions. With James I's accession he was again imprisoned for non-payment of his debts and he was even implicated and interrogated for his connections to the Gunpowder plotters (he was eventually found innocent). He died, with his debts still unpaid, in 1627.<sup>41</sup>

During the early to mid-1590s Phelippes worked for the Earl of Essex, but in 1600, with Essex out of favour and he himself in prison because of his debt to the crown, Phelippes needed a new patron. The only choice was to ingratiate himself to Cecil, and therefore he wrote to Cecil on 18 April 1600.<sup>42</sup> He started by apologising to Cecil for burdening him with yet another suitor, but said that his 'inclination to deserve of you, and my encouragement from such as have had experience of your disposition, makes me bold to renew the motion to yourself'. Hinting that he knew what Cecil was up against having to deal with numerous agents and plots during the past, Phelippes told Cecil how he could improve his intelligence-gathering network, stating that: 'the principal point in matter of intelligence is to procure confidence with those parties that one will work upon, or for those parties a man would work by, I have found the way to have both'.<sup>43</sup> Cecil must have agreed, as he wrote back to Phelippes thanking him for:

Your offer to employ yourself in Her Majesty's service with my privy and direction; for means you have yourself can judge; for the mind you have I know it of old and do allow it. And where you desire my favour, if you do make your services fruitful assure yourself I will very gladly do you any pleasure I can.<sup>44</sup>

By June 1600 Phelippes had already put his experience and contacts abroad to good use, by reporting to Cecil on the progress of his agents he had sent to Boulogne and how likely it was that the Spanish would treat for peace.<sup>45</sup> It is clear from this evidence, that throughout the

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<sup>41</sup> Alford, *The Watchers*, pp. 285-297.

<sup>42</sup> Alford, *The Watchers*, pp. 285-297; Thomas Phelippes to Cecil, 14 April 1600, SP 12/274 f.180r.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Phelippes to Cecil, 18 April 1600, SP 12/274 f.185r.

<sup>44</sup> Quote from Alford, *The Watchers*, p. 296.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Phelippes to Cecil, 16 June 1600, SP 12/275 f.10r.

1590s, especially once Cecil became principal secretary, he had utilised the expertise of Walsingham's former employees and agents. This can be seen as a shift from his father's previous conservative policy: due to the many plots and armada scares which arose over the course of the 1590s it meant that a more expansive intelligence network was needed to give better prior warnings of these threats. Although he used his own agents and secretaries, Cecil was not, unlike his father, averse to employing a range of experts and specialists if he felt that they would ultimately make his intelligence network run more efficiently.

There were likewise differences and similarities in the compositions of Cecil and Essex's secretariats. Essex's secretariat was almost all made up of men who had either an academic background, or who had a prominent presence in the academic sphere. The likes of Thomas Smith, Edward Reynolds, Henry Cuffe and William Temple all had the academic backgrounds which Essex was looking for.<sup>46</sup> Essex, as Hammer has stressed, saw that academic learning could be of practical value to the career of a professional bureaucrat and he had wanted his secretariat to be seen as an extension of his own patronage of scholarship. Furthermore, he had also enjoyed having debates with them.<sup>47</sup> As A.G.R. Smith has shown, Cecil generally picked his secretaries for their specialisms.<sup>48</sup> Both Essex and Cecil appointed men who were from relatively well-travelled backgrounds and who had practical life experiences to draw upon to help them become accustomed to managing their agents. In regards to appointing secretaries to manage their respective intelligence networks, Cecil had Munck and Willis, whereas Essex had Edward Wotton and Anthony Bacon, who had worked for Essex since 1591 and had helped to supervise his intelligence-gathering network but was not a part of the secretariat as Wotton was.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Hammer, 'The Use of Scholarship: The Secretariat of Robert Devereaux, Second Earl of Essex c.1585-1601', *EHR*, vol. 109, no. 430 (Feb 1994), pp. 27-29.

<sup>47</sup> Hammer, 'The Use of Scholarship', p. 43.

<sup>48</sup> A.G.R. Smith, 'The Secretariats of the Cecils', p. 493-94.

<sup>49</sup> Edward Wotton, first Baron Wotton, was a prominent diplomat and administrator. He found patronage under Walsingham but upon his death Wotton was passed over for taking in the responsibilities of principal secretary by Burghley who gave them to Cecil instead. In spite of this he and Cecil became good friends and even joined the committee for the disposition of troops to defend London during Essex's rising. Under James I, Wotton helped preside over the trials of Walter Raleigh, Henry Cobham,

While Essex had been based in England and attending privy council meetings during the period between 1593-1596, this had enabled him to personally manage his intelligence-gathering network. The problems started to arise once Essex had returned to active campaigning during the Cadiz expedition in 1596, the Azores voyage in 1597 and in Ireland during 1599. The smooth running of his secretariat was thrown into even greater disarray as Essex had required both Wotton and Cuffe to accompany him on campaign. Moreover, during Essex's time away, Wotton and Anthony Bacon were in a disagreement over who should have precedence over dealing with Essex's Italian correspondence.<sup>50</sup> Cecil, by contrast, had almost always remained at court, both because he was not only physically incapable of soldiering and because he saw that as the way to high political office and that power lay with staying in close proximity to the queen and privy council. This meant that he was able to keep a closer grip on the day to day running of his secretariat and intelligence-gathering network. It also meant that Cecil was more readily on hand to look over intelligence reports and to maintain contact with his agents abroad; in contrast, Essex was often tired and irritable when his secretaries presented him with reports and messages to read through.<sup>51</sup> Thus from 1597, with Essex away on campaign and Cecil consolidating his position within government, it was Cecil's intelligence network which flourished and not the Earl's.

#### Analysing Cecil's network in 1598-1601

This section of the chapter will analyse how Cecil's intelligence-gathering network was made up and reiterate his experience in intelligence-gathering matters from 1588 to 1598. Cecil had learned at the early stages of his career about the importance of being well informed. He had

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eleventh Baron Cobham and others during the Main plot. During James' reign Wotton maintained good relations with Spanish ambassadors and went on his final diplomatic mission to Paris to represent England at the accession of Louis XIII after the assassination of Henry IV. He died of illness in 1628. See his entry in ODNB; Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, pp.164-65, 173; Hammer, 'The Use of Scholarship', p. 37.

<sup>50</sup> Hammer, 'The Use of Scholarship', pp. 36-37.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 36.

been at the side of his father whilst he and Heneage had looked to scale back Walsingham's intelligence network after the old spymaster's death in 1590. From 1590 to 1592, Cecil had learnt that the art of interrogating and recruiting potential agents was fraught with difficulty and deception, as each prospective agent was just as likely to exaggerate his worth in return for the promise of a reward rather than collect useful information. This was the case with John Cecil (alias Snowden), who we have already met in chapter 2, when after extensive interviews by Burghley, Snowden was left to be handled by Cecil who managed to obtain the Jesuit priest a passport to return to the continent. After a few promising reports sent back to Cecil and Burghley, Snowden was hardly ever heard from again, which must have brought home to Cecil the realisation that the hard work put into the recruitment of an agent often did not justify the time and effort involved.

The more streamlined intelligence network that had been put in place by Burghley and Heneage was challenged by the spate of plots which occurred between 1593 and 1595. The majority of these plots had their origins in Brussels, where Sir William Stanley, Hugh Owen and other enemies of Elizabeth were based. This led Cecil, once he became principal secretary, to try to recruit agents from Stanley's own regiment in an attempt to forestall any further plotting. The need for a more comprehensive intelligence network was further reinforced during the armada scares of 1596 and 1597, when Cecil was caught off guard due to the lack of reliable intelligence. This was despite the fact that Palavicino had urged Cecil to recruit more agents in the Iberian peninsula to provide better warning of the Spanish fleet's intentions. These invasion scares also showed Cecil that other privy councillors, especially Essex, had managed to get a better warning of the armada than he had done. To make sure that this did not happen again, Cecil set about creating a more efficient and comprehensive intelligence network, not just for the country's safety but for his own political standing within the privy council.

Three surveys of Cecil's network of agents, from 1597 and 1601, enable us to make a detailed analysis of his approach during the height of his power. The first, entitled 'A list of certain

intelligencers' (probably dated from late 1597 to early 1598) details the earliest known stage of Cecil setting down on paper the beginnings of his intelligence network. The document entitled, 'A memorial of intelligencers in several places' (probably from 1598) had been drawn up as Cecil had been away on an embassy to France to discuss peace with Henry IV and he had needed an able deputy to oversee his agents whilst he was abroad. The later document, entitled 'Intelligencers imployed abroad', dated to 1601, details the expenditure on only a portion of Cecil's intelligence gathering network, but these three documents coupled together can give a clear snapshot of the setup of Cecil's intelligence network. His network changed over time as new agents were recruited and old ones discarded. An example can be seen in Henri Chasteau-Martin, who had been reporting from Bayonne and had earned 1200 crowns a year. He had been used both by Walsingham and Burghley in the past, but Burghley had for some years doubted his usefulness and loyalty. It ended up being the governor of Bayonne who eventually uncovered the fact that Chasteau-Martin had for years been feeding information to Spain and had him executed. He wrote to Essex in March 1596 that the queen should: 'find some honest man worthy of her charge'.<sup>52</sup> Agents came and went, as will be evident from both the 'List of certain intelligencers' and 'A memorial', but it is possible to pick out a few names that Cecil came to heavily rely upon during his career.

Starting with the 'List of certain intelligencers', the first point to highlight is the lack of an accurate date. The only date present on the document itself is that by William Resolde's (alias Giles Van Harwick) cipher, 5 July 1597. However, Massentio Verdiani, who was listed as an agent in Brussels, had by 1598 been moved to Seville. This move occurred between July 1597 and February 1598, when Cecil had 'A memorial' drawn up as he was preparing for his embassy to France. Therefore 'A list of certain intelligencers' must date from between July 1597 and February 1598.<sup>53</sup> The document itself appears to be a kind of index to the ciphers

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<sup>52</sup> Alford, *The Watchers*, p. 310; The Governor of Bayonne to the Earl of Essex, 15 March 1596, *HMCS*, 1596, vol. 6, p. 97.

<sup>53</sup> 'List of certain intelligencers', 1597/1598?, SP12/265 f.134r; 'A memorial of intelligencers in several places' 1598, SP 12/265 f.205r.

allocated to specific agents and it also lists who had recommended them. For example, Horatio Palavicino recommended or supervised Massentio Verdiani (who was based in Brussels) and his cipher could be found under folio number 12.<sup>54</sup> This document gives us evidence that Cecil's agents were catalogued and ordered so that ciphers and other important information could be quickly found as and when it was needed. The fact that this document was compiled in or after July 1597 (during the drama of the failed Spanish armada of that year) demonstrates that Cecil was taking steps to ensure that he was not caught unprepared again and that he was willing to use his contacts to build up his own network of agents.

Turning to the agents listed within the document, many of them (including Massentio Verdiani, Francis Lambert, Edmund Palmer, William Resolde, Robert Poley and George Nicolson) can also be found in 'A memorial' of 1598, which highlights some continuity of agents within Cecil's network as these men must have proved their value.<sup>55</sup> There is also a sense of continuity between those who Cecil relied upon to recommend or supervise his agents, such as Horatio Palavicino, William Waad, George Gilpin and John Daniell.<sup>56</sup> There are agents who are only mentioned within this specific document such as Roger Aston, Francis Bolton, Andreas Martiningo, Richard Langton, a Mr More and a Mr Muchecon. Of these, nothing is known about More or Muchecon except that they were both based in Lisbon.<sup>57</sup>

As for the other agents, Roger Aston was a well used agent employed firstly by the Earl of Leicester during the 1580s and the later by Walsingham and Burghley.<sup>58</sup> Through working for Burghley, Aston would have naturally been acquainted with Cecil and it seems that they became good friends as Cecil sent Aston's wife 20 yards of velvet which was carried by George Nicolson, another of Cecil's agents active in Scotland.<sup>59</sup> This friendliness is borne out

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, SP12/265 f.134r.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, SP12/265 f.134; 'A memorial of intelligencers in several places' 1598, SP12/265 ff. 204r-206r.

<sup>56</sup> 'List of certain intelligencers', 1597/1598?, SP 12/265 f.134r.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, SP 12/265 f.134r.

<sup>58</sup> Roger Aston to Earl of Leicester, 19 April 1583, SP 52/31 f.102r-v; Aston to Walsingham, SP 52/39 ff.4-5r-v, f. 515r-v, f. 223r-v; Robert Bowes to Burghley, SP 52/47 f. 32r-v, f. 108r-v, f. 114r-v; Aston to Robert Bowes, 30 November 1591, SP 52/47 f. 144 r-v.

<sup>59</sup> Aston to Cecil, 15 October 1595, SP 52/52 f. 42r-v.

in the letters that Aston sent to Cecil which are both respectful and familiar and Cecil clearly valued Aston as an agent as he sent Aston £100 for his services during the year 1596.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, Aston was also given the important task of carrying the docquets for James VI's pension which was paid in two half-yearly instalments of £2,500.<sup>61</sup> Francis Bolton was overseen by Waad and was stationed in Seville where, according to his cipher document, he was paid approximately £30 a year.<sup>62</sup> He was also previously employed by Walsingham and his first employer had to defend him against a non-payment of a fine due to a false declaration over a consignment of herring that Bolton had brought.<sup>63</sup> This could possibly have been the way in which he chose to become an agent to pay back the debt that he owed Walsingham.

Richard Langton and Andreas Martiningo are the only other names on the list for whom any meaningful background information has survived. Richard Langton was overseen by John Daniell, a long-term agent used by Burghley, Heneage and Cecil who had contacts in Ireland and Scotland.<sup>64</sup> Langton's role was to keep watch on the port of Calais and for this work he received an income of two shillings a day and which was given to him by the merchant Otwell Smith.<sup>65</sup> Langton's payment document is dated to 15 December 1596 so it can be safely assumed that Langton started working for Cecil after this date.<sup>66</sup> There is even less information in regards to Andreas Martiningo. He wrote a letter to Cecil on 18 August 1596 asking for employment as he had been imprisoned as a suspected agent of Spain. Martiningo implored Cecil to use his Spanish contacts, stating that he had previously worked under Walsingham.<sup>67</sup> Cecil must have been moved to accept his offer as he was overseen by both Waad and Poley

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<sup>60</sup> Aston to Cecil, 9 September 1595, SP 52/57 f.5r; Aston to Cecil, 28 July 1596, SP 52/59 f.16r; For the document thanking Cecil for the gift of £100 see Aston to Cecil, 25 February 1596, SP 52/58 f.28r-v.

<sup>61</sup> Cecil to Nicolson, [June] 1602, SP 52/68 f.72r-v.

<sup>62</sup> Francis Bolton's cipher, SP 106/1 f.27v.

<sup>63</sup> Cobham to Walsingham, 16 May 1579, SP 12/131 f.45r-v; Note on the quantity of herring brought by Francis Bolton, 1579, SP 12/131 f.46r.

<sup>64</sup> List of certain intelligencers, 1597/1598?, SP 12/265 f.134r.

<sup>65</sup> Payments to Richard Langton, 1596?, SP 78/38 f.178r; Langton on works at Callice [Calias], 1596?, SP 94/5 ff.162-164r-v; R.B Wernham (eds), *Lists and analysis of State Papers, Foreign Series, Elizabeth I, Vol 7, [January to December 1596]*, p. 140.

<sup>66</sup> Payments to Richard Langton, 1596?, SP 78/38 f.178r

<sup>67</sup> Andreas Martiningo to Cecil, 18 August 1596, *HMCS*, 1596, vol. 6, p. 340.



and he was part of Cecil's Flanders network from at least November 1596.<sup>68</sup> He received his pay of £6 a year from a merchant called Wheeler which was sanctioned by Waad; Martiningo physically received this money by March 1596.<sup>69</sup> With the 'List of certain intelligencers' document analysed, the second document 'A memorial of intelligencer in several places' 1598, will show how Cecil's intelligence network expanded and changed in the intervening few years.

The first thing that becomes apparent when one first looks at the 'A memorial' document is the names of the cities and locations where his agents were based. Cecil based his agents in the important coastal areas of the bay of Biscay and the Iberian cities of Santiago de Compostela, Lisbon, Bayonne and Seville, as well as the important hubs of trade that were Brussels, Rome, Campania (a province in southern Italy) and Amsterdam. The different nationalities of Cecil's agents and their backgrounds are also of interest, as his agents ranged from Englishmen, Irish, Scottish to Dutch, Italian and Spanish; in order to converse with different peoples, his agents must have been multilingual. Their nationalities and professions were also important depending on where they were based. Paul Theobaste, for example, who was based at Ferrol and A Coruña, was a factor for a Spanish merchant, which meant that he would draw less suspicion upon himself than an Englishman or a Frenchman would. Cecil's agents were mostly merchants or their factors, but there were also those who came from a range of professions. These included Androwe Hunter, a Scottish preacher, who had travelled throughout Campania picking up Italian news; a novice priest at the Jesuit seminary at Eu in Normandy; an Irishman who watched the 'privye keies at the water syde' in London; and Sir Charles Danvers, who resided in Venice.

Danvers was an interesting choice as an agent, indeed he is one of the few working for Cecil whose background is well known. He was a well-travelled student and soldier, having fought in the Netherlands during the 1588-89 expedition, where he had garnered connections with

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<sup>68</sup> List of certain intelligencers, 1597/1598?, SP 12/265 f.134r; Money paid to Andreas Martiningo, 23 November 1596, SP 77/5 f.207r.

<sup>69</sup> Wernham, *List and analysis*, vol. 7, [Jan to Dec 1596], p. 218.

the Sidneys and, through them, the Earl of Essex. Furthermore, he was also connected to the Cecils through his mother's side. His father had extensive estates in Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Yorkshire to which Charles was the heir. His travels took him to Venice and Rome, where he embraced catholicism after a visit to the Pope. This led to his arrest and imprisonment in December 1593, on his return to England, before he convinced the authorities of his loyalty. However, at this point his life as the heir of a wealthy gentry landowner takes a turn. In 1594, he and his younger brother Henry had to flee the country secretly after Henry shot dead Henry Long, a rival landholder in Wiltshire, during an attack led by the two brothers. This led them to escape into exile on the continent. The brothers were eventually pardoned in 1598, by which time Charles had become increasingly close to Essex, so much so that he participated in his failed rebellion for which he was executed on Tower Hill on 18 March 1601.<sup>70</sup>

During his exile, travelling around Italy and France, Danvers occasionally sent Cecil intelligence or important gossip that he picked up. One letter, dated 10 June 1598 whilst Danvers was residing in Paris, encapsulates his motives for becoming an intelligencer. Danvers's main motive was to obtain a pardon for himself and his brother Henry, although he still feared 'a delaying attendance on that which shall never take effect'.<sup>71</sup> Possibly Cecil had promised him this pardon, as Danvers wrote: 'I shall look for your letters as for an oracle, for such you promised they should be'.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, just ten days later, Danvers wrote again to Cecil to express himself 'infinitely indebted for your care to finish this long exile', and how through his industry he had managed to 'have drawn the offices of all other men into your own hands'.<sup>73</sup> This is an example of Cecil using a form of blackmail in order to recruit an agent in a strategically placed area to exploit the agent's contacts. Cecil seems to have promised Danvers a reprieve of his exile if he agreed to work for him. Cecil was not above exploiting a person's plight if it could yield advantages for himself.

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<sup>70</sup> Danvers, Sir Charles (c. 1568–1601), *ODNB*.

<sup>71</sup> Danvers to Cecil, 10 June 1598, SP 12/267 f.74r.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, SP 12/267 f.74r.

<sup>73</sup> Danvers to Cecil, 20 June 1598, *CSPD*, 1598-1601, vol. 267, p. 64.

Altogether, in 1598, Cecil had twenty agents operating around Europe and in England.<sup>74</sup> Men such as Sir William Stanley, Hugh Owen, Jacques Francisco and Robert Parsons had to be watched, as did the port cities in the Iberian peninsula for signs of any build-up of warships or land forces capable of invading England. The agents listed were mainly focussed on the monitoring of ship and troop movements, as well as court gossip, such as his agents reporting on the number of troops embarking on the ships bound for Ireland in 1601 and the rumours of disagreements over policy between Philip III and the Archduke.<sup>75</sup> This was instead of the rather more difficult and dangerous task of infiltrating the Spanish court and the English catholic exiles.

Two of the highest paid agents were William Resolde in Lisbon and Massentio Verdiani, (both listed in the previous document), in Seville, who were each paid 400 ducats a year. William Resolde (who wrote under the alias of Giles van Harwick) corresponded with Cecil (who in turn wrote under the alias of Peter Artson) and sent intelligence reports up to three or four times a month in some years.<sup>76</sup> His messages were conveyed to Cecil via London merchants Edward Savage and Thomas Honiman.<sup>77</sup> Harwick provided intelligence on a range of subjects: locations of Spanish treasure ships; rumours of potential build-up of armadas and their likely destinations; and information about Spanish spies who were based in England and other European port cities.<sup>78</sup> In one letter, Harwick warned Cecil of a Jesuit informant called Coniers who had been at 'Madrid, Valladolid ... among the Jesuits and embarked in a Scottish ship for Plymouth; he should be examined'. He also advised Cecil about the state of mind of the Spanish king: 'the king of Spain is clear spent ... If he makes peace with France and the Low Countries, it is but to save riches, and gather a great head together to be revenged on England. The only way for England to be revenged of him is by being master of the sea'.<sup>79</sup> During the

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<sup>74</sup> 'A memorial of Intelligencers in several places' 1598, SP 12/265 f.204r-206r.

<sup>75</sup> Harwick to Cecil, 9/19 May 1599, SP 94/6 f.222r-v; Allen, *Pax Hispanica*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>76</sup> Giles van Harwick [alias William Resould] to Peter Artson [alias Cecil], CSPD, 1598-1601, vols 267-68, pp. 3,9, 10, 25, 33, 37, 41, 43-44, 55-56, 65-66, 70-71, 91.

<sup>77</sup> 'A memorial of Intelligencers in several places' 1598, SP 12/265/204r.

<sup>78</sup> Harwick to Cecil, CSPD, 1598-1601, vols 267-68, pp. 43-44, 91.

<sup>79</sup> Harwick to Cecil 25 June/ 5 July 1598, CSPD, 1598-1601, vol. 267, pp. 65-66

series of armadas in 1596-99 Harwick had provided good information only for the information itself to come to Cecil too late to be of any practical use. As we have seen, in 1599, Harwick insisted that the rumours of an armada were just that, but at the time Cecil was not in a position to ignore a potential threat to the realm.

Operating at the same time as Harwick, the Italian Massentio Verdiani was another agent, like Theobaste, to be recommended by Palavicino.<sup>80</sup> Verdiani sent his messages via Rouen to an agent in the city, an Englishman called Andover, who then sent Verdiani's letters to a merchant in Waterford, from where they were forwarded to Cecil. The sending of intelligence reports by an indirect, circuitous route provided some protection against them being intercepted, and once again, trusted merchants were the cogs that made the system work, albeit at a somewhat slow pace.<sup>81</sup>

Cecil also relied upon his contacts among the merchants willing to travel to and from the continent who could then pass on messages and payment to his agents and even recommend potential recruits to his network. The majority of the agents listed within 'A memorial' sent their information to the London merchants for whom they worked, and they would then send on the letters on to Cecil and his secretariat. In this respect, Cecil's intelligence-gathering network could not work without them. This importance is demonstrated by Sir Horatio Palavicino, who was a well-connected merchant born in Genoa, who had ingratiated himself into the higher echelons of Tudor government through his trade in alum from the Low Countries to England. He had passed on intelligence that he had obtained to Walsingham and Burghley before carrying on the same work with Cecil. Indeed, it is noted in the 'A memorial' document that it was Palavicino who had recommended that Paul Theobaste and Verdiani survey the sea passages at A Coruña, Ferrol and Seville.<sup>82</sup> Another set of merchants were the Honiman (or Honyman) brothers, Thomas and Phillip. They were originally members of the merchant

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<sup>80</sup> Palavicino to Cecil, 15 Dec 1596, *HMCS*, 1596, vol. 6, pp. 111-112, 174; Massentio Verdiani to [Cecil?], 17/ 27 February 1597, *HMCS*, 1597, vol. 7, p. 71.

<sup>81</sup> 'A memorial of Intelligencers in several places', SP 12/265 f.205r; Alford, *The Watchers*, p. 312.

<sup>82</sup> 'A memorial of Intelligencers in several places', SP 12/265 f.204; Lawrence Stone, *An Elizabethan: Sir Horatio Palavicino*, (Oxford, 1956), Chapter 6.

adventurers or the Spanish Company trading along the Spanish coast. In 1586, both the merchants and the Elizabethan government decided to suspend the Spanish Company, due to the embargos placed on trade, as the antagonism between England and Spain erupted into full scale war.<sup>83</sup> Thomas and Phillip were accepted back into the newly resurrected Spanish Company following the cession of war in 1604.<sup>84</sup> Their names and signatures also appeared on the Charter of 1605, in which James I and other prominent members of the government and the Spanish Company set out the new parameters of trade between England and Spain.<sup>85</sup>

The brothers had been corresponding with Cecil from at least 1594, when Thomas, probably the senior of the two, had set out in a letter their usefulness in that they had their own ship and crew and the experience of navigating the Bay of Biscay and the northern ports of Spain. Honiman also suggested that a 'small quantity of rosin she may carry she will avoid suspicion'.<sup>86</sup>

To increase their chances of employment to Cecil he described how Chasteau-Martin (the agent based at Bayonne who would later be executed as a double-agent in 1596) had asked them to convey a Frenchman, sent by Sir Francis Walsingham, into Spain, which they did. Honiman then described how this could be done likewise for Cecil, 'Such a man, contrived into mariner's attire, may be so directed that none of the rest of the bark shall know otherwise than [that] he goeth for their fellow mariner. He may bring notice of their strength, what voyage they pretend, and by what time they may be ready, with other advices'.<sup>87</sup>

The Honiman brothers then, as is evident from their regular correspondence with Cecil in the years thereafter, gave him a crucial link between the agents that he wanted to place along the Spanish coast and his secretariat in London. The Honimans allowed agents and their

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<sup>83</sup> Pauline Croft, *The Spanish Company* (London, 1973), pp. 7, 26.

<sup>84</sup> Croft, *The Spanish Company*, p. 21-23.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas Honiman to Cecil, 4 December 1594, *HMCS*, 1594-95, vol. 5, pp. 28-29.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, *HMCS*, 1594-95, vol. 5, pp. 28-29.

payments to be smuggled in and their intelligence reports to be smuggled out, albeit not without some risk of discovery by the Spanish authorities.

Merchants could also use their expertise in suggesting ways in which Cecil could smuggle information out of enemy territory as they knew what crew and cargo would raise the least suspicion. For example, by crewing the bark with Frenchmen, Spanish port officials would be less inclined to become suspicious of them, as from 1594, Henry IV was beginning to back out of the war with Spain and to negotiate peace. Furthermore, their cargo of resin added to the level of legitimacy which would be needed to avoid suspicion. Therefore, it would not be much of an exaggeration to see the Honiman brothers as a crucial cog in Cecil's intelligence-gathering network.

Cecil used other merchants such as Edward Savage and Tobias Tucker, who carried Harwick and Peter Gerrarde's letters from Lisbon to London. There were also two unnamed merchants based in Rouen who carried Verdiani's letters, as well as Hans Owter, who carried Andover's correspondence.<sup>88</sup> This meant that Cecil learnt from the limitations of 1596 and 1597 in only having only two merchants, in that case Honiman and Palavicino, to carry his agents' messages for him. By choosing to increase the locations and routes by which letters were sent to him, this would in theory yield more chances of intelligence reports reaching Cecil. This method again emulated that of Walsingham's network and it also had the added benefit that if, for example, Peter Gerrarde's reports were lost, then Harwick, who was also based in Lisbon, might still get his intelligence delivered to Cecil's secretariat so that Cecil would not be completely in the dark as to Spanish intentions for England. It can be surmised that merchants, with their knowledge and expertise of operating in foreign countries, were a key aspect of Cecil's intelligence network. Walsingham had also used merchants as a key component of his ability to gather information. As Conyers Read has highlighted, Walsingham had, throughout the 1570s and 80s, invested and sponsored various merchant missions to

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<sup>88</sup> 'A memorial of Intelligencers in several places' 1598, SP 12/265 f. 204r-205r.

Russia, Venice, Turkey and most notably to North America, and in return these merchants sent back valuable information on the political landscape and any developments that may affect England's burgeoning maritime interests.<sup>89</sup>

The use of merchants were not the only means by which Cecil's agents could receive payments and send their messages to Cecil. English ambassadors serving abroad were also a good way in which secret messages could be conveyed, especially if Cecil remained on good terms with them. One such ambassador was George Gilpin, who made sure that one of Cecil's agents in Lisbon, Balt Peterson, could send and receive messages to and from his master and receive payment from Cecil. This meant that Peterson's letters went via another circuitous route from Lisbon to the Low Countries and on to London.<sup>90</sup> George Gilpin had an extensive diplomatic career in the Low Countries. By 1586, he was the secretary to Sir Thomas Bodley, the English councillor to the Dutch Council of State, and in 1593, he had replaced Bodley as the English councillor, a role he would keep for the rest of his life.<sup>91</sup>

Within the 'A memorial' document there is also an indication of how agents were found and recruited into Cecil's network. In the margins of the document there can be found notes of who had been recommended to him and who had been receiving the agent's correspondence on Cecil's behalf. For example, alongside the information about Paul Theobaste, Cecil wrote in the margin: 'This man was recommended to me by Sir Horatio [Palavicino]'<sup>92</sup>. Further examples can be seen beside the agents listed as operating in Lisbon, where Peter Gerrarde was 'known to Mr Wade [Waad] to be very sufficient' and Peterson was 'found out for me by Mr Gilpin and he hath already of me for one yeare the soome of £140 which Mr Gilpin hath paied'.<sup>93</sup> This an indication that Cecil had been happy to allow others to manage his agents on his behalf. These men, such as Palavicino and Gilpin, were ideally placed to perform this

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<sup>89</sup> Conyers Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham and the Policy of Queen Elizabeth*, (3 vols, Oxford, 1925), vol. 3, pp. 270-79, 400-402.

<sup>90</sup> 'A memorial of Intelligencers in several places' 1598, SP 12/265 f.205r-206r.

<sup>91</sup> Wernham, *The Return of the Armadas*, p. 73.

<sup>92</sup> 'A memorial of Intelligencers in several places' 1598, SP 12/265 f.204r.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, SP 12/265 f.204r.

role as they had extensive contacts within the regions, where they were based. It also meant that Cecil was spared the time consuming task of having to actively recruit agents himself. This can be explained by the demands placed upon him, especially after 1596, when his responsibilities grew to such an extent that there were times when his attention was needed to be more focused on matters of state rather than solely on the management of his intelligence-gathering network. There does not appear to be much evidence that Cecil was very systematic in his approach in recruiting his agents, which could partly help to explain some of his failures. This seems to be the case when one considers that most agents either approached him or were recommended to him by others.

Near the bottom of 'A memorial' Cecil dictated instructions to one of his secretaries to set down how his correspondence was to be handled during his absence. The document instructed the reader to 'leave order that all letters w[hich] come to me be brought to my lo: [lord] my father [Burghley] and all ordinarye dispatches to be then redd to her Maiestye: or the letters by Mr Smithe Mr Waade or Mr. Windebanke as the nature of the advertisement requireth'.<sup>94</sup> Certainly, with his father's increasingly frail health (Burghley would succumb to his ill health in August 1598) it made sense to make use of his other allies at court.<sup>95</sup> For example, Sir Thomas Smith had managed to balance successfully his divided loyalties between Essex and the Cecils. He had been Essex's secretary before his appointment as a clerk of the privy council in 1595, but he had soon recognised that he needed Cecilian patronage to further advance his career.<sup>96</sup> William Waad (later knighted at the start of James I's reign and who we have met before) had by 1598, worked closely with Cecil on a number of occasions: in intelligence-gathering matters; and in assisting in the interrogation of captured Jesuit priests, suspected traitors and recusants. Waad was certainly an important and useful ally and, once Cecil was secretary, a subordinate to make use of whilst he was away from

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<sup>94</sup> 'Ibid, SP 12/265 f.206r.

<sup>95</sup> Stephen Alford, Burghley, *William Cecil at the court of Elizabeth I* (London, 2008), chapter 20; Handover, *The Second Cecil*, pp. 166, 179-181.

<sup>96</sup> Jacqueline D. Vaughan, 'Secretaries, Staesmen and Spies: The Clerks of the Tudor Privy Council, c.1540-c.1603', (Unpublished PhD, University of St. Andrews, 2007), pp. 118-119..



court.<sup>97</sup> Thomas Windebank had, by 1598, been appointed as one of the clerks of the signet and of the privy council; he had also worked for Burghley from the 1560s, even acting as Thomas Cecil's chaperone whilst Burghley's elder son had been on his grand tour of Europe.<sup>98</sup> These three men all had existing connections to the Cecils and therefore through the patronage system that invisibly linked every court servant and councillor together, it was in their own interests to safeguard Cecil's correspondence whilst he was on his embassy to France.

The 1601 document, entitled 'Intelligencers imployed abroade this yeare' is a list of dates, names and sums paid to Cecil's agents over the preceding year.<sup>99</sup> In fact, the sums between the two documents demonstrate how much money had been invested into the maintenance of Cecil's agents. Approximately £1,145 was being spent on agents, according to the figures listed in the two documents.<sup>100</sup> Funds were authorised by warrants under the privy seal; thus the custodian of the privy seal held a privileged and powerful position with the Tudor bureaucracy. Luckily for Cecil, Elizabeth had seen fit to pass on to him the privy seal after his father's death, which did lessen the burden on Cecil's own personal finances.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, he knew that investing in an intelligence-gathering network was a worthy use of the state's money, in order to stop the numerous plots and invasion scares that could potentially topple the Tudor monarchy.

The sort of figures that are noted down on the two documents ranged from as little as five crowns, which was paid to Kendall on 8 May 1598, to £100 to Harwick for the year 1598.<sup>102</sup> Cecil had also seen fit to acquire two new agents in Venice; perhaps the most well informed city in Europe, it was only natural that Cecil would wish to hear of any gossip or rumours which

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<sup>97</sup> Richard C. Barnett, *Place, Profit and Power: A Study of the Servants of William Cecil, Elizabethan Statesman*, (Chapel Hill, NC, 1969), pp.142-143.

<sup>98</sup> Handover, *The Second Cecil*, p. 73; Alford, *Burghley*, pp. 113, 115-118.

<sup>99</sup> 'Intelligencers imployed abroade this yeare' 1601, SP 12/283 f.176r.

<sup>100</sup> This figure is calculated with the conversion rate given by Lawrence Stone that one ducat was equal to 5s. 6d., Stone, *Palavicino*, Appendix III, p. 325.

<sup>101</sup> Penry Williams, *The Tudor Regime* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 39-43.

<sup>102</sup> 'A memorial of Intelligencers in several places' 1598, SP 12/265 f.204r; Intelligencers imployed abroade this yeare 1601, SP 12/283 f.176r.

passed through its ports or from its city officials. It was for this task that he had employed Thomas Wilson, who would later assist Munck with the maintenance of his networks.<sup>103</sup> This promotion, from an agent to a secretary, demonstrates that Cecil rewarded diligent service. It is also an indication that not all agents were inept or were easily discarded: there were some that showed enough promise to have long careers as agents and could be utilised for more wide ranging responsibilities than just observation.

These two documents, however, do not inform us of how the relationship between agents and their employers could be fractious at times. Cecil could deal sharply with anyone that he felt had been either cheating him or not justifying their pay. This can be seen in a letter to George Nicolson, his principal agent in Scotland, where he fiercely criticised Thomas Douglas for wasting the quarterly £10 that he had given him to spy on the archduke's camp. Cecil wrote:

For when I saw such humour abound in him [Douglas] as not only to trifle away my money for his intelligence to little purpose, but even in the conclusion to complain I had not used him well, or say that I had employed him in private business of mine own, I did by way of prevention make known all my employments of him, both in Ireland for intelligence and elsewhere, knowing well that my conscience could not be accused before God or man for any other purpose than to do my country service.<sup>104</sup>

He had wanted Douglas to redeem himself by staying in Scotland and finding out if the catholic Scottish Earls were in fact acting against England. Cecil would let him keep on receiving the ten pounds a year, but provided that he did not use the influence of Cecil's name to gain patronage or positions of employment without Cecil's own expressed permission. He ended his letter to Nicolson by bemoaning 'never poor man hath been oftener belied than I have been in such cases'.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> A.G.R Smith, 'Secretaries of the Cecils', p. 497.

<sup>104</sup> Cecil to George Nicolson, 17 January 1602, *HMCS*, 1602-03, vol. 12, pp. 23-25.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, *HMCS*, 1602-03, vol. 12, p. 24.

This is one of the very few instances in which Cecil had to personally remonstrate with one of his agents who he had felt had undermined or humiliated him, and needed to be reminded that he expected reasonable results for the money that he invested in them. This letter is also another reminder that early modern spymasters had little control over the agents whom they employed when they were in the field. Evidently this was not the first time Cecil had been treated like this, for he had complained in the same letter to Nicolson that 'I have been so often bitten with the discontented humour of intelligencers when they have spent my money a good while and think I begin to find it, and so play me some slippery trick at farewell'.<sup>106</sup> This frustration can be clearly seen in the crossings out and scribbled corrections of the letters, with Cecil even, it seems, taking the pen from the secretary and adding annotations himself.<sup>107</sup>

#### Cecil's relationship with the Queen

A key element of Cecil's role as an intelligencer lay in managing his relationship with the queen. The queen was obviously the head of the government, the prime mover, and it was ultimately the monarch's decision as to whom she chose to promote and to serve on her privy council. In order to understand Cecil's growing relationship with Elizabeth, the social and political structure of the court should first be set out. Wallace MacCaffrey has described the mechanics of the Elizabethan political system in terms of a solar system, with the queen acting as the focal point around which the privy councillors and other courtiers revolved. However, MacCaffrey confessed that the solar system analogy can break down once one analyses how the Elizabethan political system worked, as the system of patronage, which permeated every aspect of Elizabethan political society, was much more fluid.<sup>108</sup> The system placed enormous emphasis on membership of the privy council, as these men had the most regular contact with the sovereign. The privy council was a small committee which acted as both the central

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<sup>106</sup> Cecil to George Nicolson, 17 January 1602, *HMCS*, 1602-03, vol. 12, pp. 23.

<sup>107</sup> Cecil Papers, 84/74; *HMCS*, 1602-03, vol. 12, pp. 23-25.

<sup>108</sup> W. T. MacCaffrey, *Queen Elizabeth and the Making of Policy 1572-1588* (Princeton, 1981), pp. 431-432.

administration of the government and a source of advice to the monarch on policy.<sup>109</sup> This meant, in MacCaffrey's view, that the role of the courtier was diminished and that those outside the inner circle of the privy council were denied a major role in the decision making process.<sup>110</sup>

MacCaffrey also provided a useful, if very rough, categorisation of three different types of people who made up the Elizabethan privy council. He defined them by their various political ambitions, although he admitted this was by no means fixed. Firstly there were the politicians; men who wanted to shape policy and to share the decision making process at its highest level. MacCaffrey included Burghley, the Earl of Leicester, Walsingham and Hatton in this group, and Cecil and the Earl of Essex can also be added. The second group were the courtiers, who MacCaffrey had said were men whose ambitions were narrowly personal, although some did hold strong ideological views. Within this category, he placed the royal cousins of Hunsdon, Knollys, Buckhurst and Howard of Effingham as a special sub-group. Another sub-group would be the Earls of ancient descent, such as the Earls of Sussex, Lincoln, Derby and Shrewsbury; these were men of ambition whose status was hereditary, but they were essentially outside the inner circle of the first group. The final group were the bureaucrats such as Mildmay and Sadler. These were appointed due to their expertise and confined their ambition to departmental business. Cecil had worked closely with members of this last group before he had become principal secretary; he had valued their work and did not look down on them as those such as the Earl of Essex and Leicester had done.<sup>111</sup> This was the political world which Cecil had to navigate, and the different sorts of people he had to work alongside with throughout his political career.

If the queen was the centre from which all political power and influence originated, then becoming her secretary meant that the incumbent had a firm say on who could or could not have access to the queen and thus her favour. In his work, 'A Treatise of the Office of Councillor and Principall Secretarie to her Ma[jes]tie' (previously discussed in chapter four),

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<sup>109</sup> MacCaffrey, *Making of Policy*, p. 432; Penry Williams, *The Tudor Regime*, pp. 30-33.

<sup>110</sup> MacCaffrey, *Making of Policy*, p. 432.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, pp. 438-439.

Robert Beale offered advice on how the principal secretary should manage his daily audiences and briefings with the queen. He advised that he should carry a note of the topics that he was going to discuss with the queen and divide them into 'titles of publicke and private sutes as the L[ord] Thre[asur]er and Mr. Secretarye were wonte to do'. Indeed, Cecil may have used the same technique to help him remember the points he had wanted to discuss with Elizabeth during his own audiences.

Beale also gave practical advice for how subtly to manoeuvre the queen into agreeing to proposals she might at first be set against. This could be done by making sure that she was entertained with witty remarks or conversation, as flattery was an important tool in order to win her support. As Beale suggests 'When her highnes is angrie or not well disposed trouble her not w[i]th anie matter w[hi]ch you desire to have done unless extreame necessitie urge it'. Indeed, 'When her highnes signeth, it shalbe good to entertaine her w[i]th some relac[i]on or speech whereat shee may take some pleasure'.<sup>112</sup> Sidney was the brother of the celebrated poet and soldier, Sir Phillip Sidney, who had been killed at the battle of Zutphen in September 1586, making Sir Robert the head of the Sidney family, as his father had died six months earlier. In 1589, he was appointed to the governorship of Flushing, one of the cautionary towns that the Dutch had granted to England as security for the large loan which Elizabeth had provided. Rowland Whyte was his man of business who endlessly sought both financial and military aid for his beleaguered master, as throughout the 1590s, the cautionary towns were consistently underfunded and undermanned due to England's more pressing military commitments in Ireland.<sup>113</sup> Their correspondence also chronicled goings-on at court and, crucially for this thesis, the accounts of Cecil's interactions with the queen and his growing standing at court, especially in 1598-1601.

Throughout their correspondence, Whyte described his increasing reliance upon Cecil's influence to get Sidney's requests for troops or victuals approved and to also try and get the

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<sup>112</sup> Beale, 'A Treatise', p. 438.

<sup>113</sup> HMC De L'Isle and Dudley, Introduction, pp. v-vi.

grievances of Noel de Caron (ambassador for the States General) a fair hearing. Caron and Whyte had known that they first had to persuade Cecil to their way of thinking if they were to stand a chance of persuading the queen. In one letter Whyte recounts that 'When Mr Secretary went to the Privy Chamber, Mons Charon called me unto him and said Mr Secretary had dealt with the queen about the horse troops but found her unwilling, though it were no further charge unto her'. This led to Whyte having to pull the principal secretary aside as he had been about to go to dinner, as Whyte

Besought him to let me know her Majesty's pleasure: the Queen, said he, is resolved not to do it, and thinks foot more serviceable unto her than horse, and that the States desire it only to do your master pleasure. I begin to fear your opposition to Lord Cobham occasions this dealing towards you, whereby appears the power he hath with the Queen to pleasure and hurt.<sup>114</sup>

Evidently there had been some friction between Sidney and Cecil at this time, since Cecil had influence over how favourably or unfavourably suits could be presented to the queen. To make sure that his petitions were granted Whyte had cautioned his master not to do anything to antagonise Cecil.

Perhaps the most telling and insightful episode in which the nature of the relationship between Cecil and the queen can be gauged is from an audience between the queen and Sir William Browne and Sir Thomas Bodley. Once Browne had given Sidney's letters to Cecil (most likely requesting victuals), Cecil 'was pleased to lett the Queens letters be delivered by my self; and very honorably on Sunday morning after prayers the Queen [was] walking into the garden'. After Bodley's audience with the queen had finished, 'Mr Secretary mentioned me; she presently called for mee, and was pleased to say I was welcome with many good wordes'. Cecil had previously warned Browne from his coach, as he had been arriving at court that

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<sup>114</sup> Rowland Whyte to Sir Robert Sidney, 30 April 1597, C.L. Kingsford and William Shaw, (eds), *Report on the Manuscripts of Lord De L'Isle and Dudley preserved at Penshurst Palace*, Historical Manuscripts Commission (London, 1934), p. 273.

morning, that he would have an audience with her and that he should come prepared with his answers to her questions as well. As Browne recounted: 'After [a] long talk at length Mr Secretary came, who was pleased to grace me still more and more, and talk was ministered again of the army'. Cecil then asked the queen if she would consent to writing to Sir Francis Vere, the commander of Elizabeth's forces in the Netherlands, to move part of his army to reinforce Ostend, which was then being besieged by the Spanish.<sup>115</sup>

There are many interesting points to take from this audience. In one way, this can give an insight into how a typical audience might pan out, with Cecil subtly controlling when and how favourable petitions were to be made and received, as it was his recommendations that put the queen in a suitable frame of mind. Another way to look at this audience is the way in which Cecil manipulated Browne by getting him to put the queen into a good mood, to which he could then steer the audience to ask about the movement of troops to reinforce Ostend; a motion that may have been his principal aim of the audience. At the very end of the audience the queen, having indeed granted Cecil's request, turned to Browne and said "Doest thou see that little fellow that kneeles there; it hath been told you that he hath bene an enemy to souldiours. On my Faith, Browne, he is the best frend that souldiours have".<sup>116</sup> This short outburst defending her principal secretary said a lot about their working relationship. Even though he could never hope to have the same uniquely close friendship that his father had enjoyed with the queen, this did not mean that Elizabeth did not respect Cecil as someone whom she could rely on and was deserving of her protection.

Furthermore, as principal secretary, Cecil could be seen as a scapegoat by Elizabeth's army commanders, as he lacked any martial record to endear him to Elizabeth's generals and governors, who mostly came from the old aristocratic families. The queen's anger was probably directed at Sidney, for the animosity he may have shown Cecil in his previous letters, and Cecil once again played the part of a grateful humble servant by answering: 'That it was

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<sup>115</sup> Sir William Browne to Sir Robert Sidney, 12 August 1601, London, *HMC De L'Isle and Dudley*, pp. 532-534.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 532-534.

from her Majesty alone, from whom flowed all souldiours good'.<sup>117</sup> This audience can encapsulate both the mutual respect between principal secretary and monarch, but it can also make evident Cecil's political skill in reading Elizabeth's frequent mood changes and tempers. This enabled him to broach difficult or potentially sensitive subjects when she was in the best frame of mind to grant them.

Elizabeth's favour towards Cecil was not only vocal, but also came in the form of gifts and also in the acceptance of gifts from the principal secretary himself. Indeed, in the new year of 1599, Whyte commented on how 'Mr Secretary hath bestowed great and many New Year's gifts this yeare at Court. Her Majestys favour increases towards hym, soe carefull he is of her business and service. And indeed the whole waight of the State lies upon hym'.<sup>118</sup> This was further emphasised by Whyte commenting how frequently the queen played cards with Cecil in private, along with the other members of her privy council.<sup>119</sup> Cecil also received his share of gifts from recipients, conscious of the advantages of having the patronage of a man of his position and influence. The wife of Sir Robert Sidney, Barbara Sidney, née Gamage, instructed Whyte to present Cecil with some fine cloth imported from Holland so that he could make shirts out of it. To which Whyte thought it, would be best to give the cloth to him 'in a time I will pick out and put him in mind of her suit for your return'.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, other Elizabethan soldiers, such as Sir Edward Uvedale, the Marshal of Flushing, gave Cecil a fair pied gelding as a present.<sup>121</sup> So great was Cecil's influence during these years that Whyte urged Sidney to 'write often to him for his love is worthy the seeking. He is one that her Majesty exceedingly values and is most trusted by her'.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, pp. 532-534.

<sup>118</sup> Rowland Whyte to Sir Robert Sidney, 5 January 1599, *HMC De L'Isle and Dudley*, p. 427.

<sup>119</sup> Same to the same, 28 Dec 1599, *HMC De L'Isle and Dudley*, p. 425.

<sup>120</sup> Same to the same, 23 June 1600, *HMC De L'Isle and Dudley*, pp. 469-470.

<sup>121</sup> Same to the same, 12 Nov 1595, London, *HMC De L'Isle and Dudley*, p. 184.

<sup>122</sup> Same to the same, October 1599, Strand, *HMC De L'Isle and Dudley*, p. 393.



## Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the differences and similarities of the intelligence-gathering networks that were used by Walsingham, Burghley, Essex and Robert Cecil and how Cecil's relationship with the queen was cemented during the years 1598-1601. It has also shown that in comparing Cecil's intelligence-gathering network to those of Walsingham's, there are more similarities than differences. For example, since various agents previously used by Walsingham were both still alive and active, it made sense for Cecil to make use of their experience and specialisms; the same went for his secretariat in the employment of Phelippes and Arthur Gregory. Cecil's secretariat and intelligence-gathering network contained plenty of his own appointments. Nevertheless, the techniques and methods used to carry letters to and from the continent, the use of merchants and of postal safe houses, were copied from Walsingham during the late 1570s and 1580s.

The most obvious reason for this could have been that there was no better alternative to follow than Walsingham's success within the intelligence-gathering sphere. In regards to the construction of his intelligence network, Cecil was not an innovator. He had instead used the tried and tested methods which Walsingham had used before him and had recruited former Walsingham agents and secretaries to bolster his own network. This is not to criticise Cecil, as there were mitigating circumstances: Walsingham, for example, had not had to deal with a war on two, and at one time, on three fronts. Nor did Walsingham have to deal with a serious rival both for his influence in the intelligence-gathering sphere or for his position amongst the queen advisors. In short, Walsingham did not have to deal with an Essex, as he had had Burghley to carry the majority of the burden of running the state.

There were more differences to be found when comparing the methods between Cecil and his father. Burghley had very much wanted to cut the costs of maintaining Walsingham's expansive networks, whereas Cecil had wanted to maintain or even increase that expenditure. Burghley had also wanted to downsize the number of agents that were active, in that he was only willing to recruit agents in the areas where England's interests were most at threat, such

as in Spain and Rome. Instead, Cecil had wanted to spread his net of agents over a much wider field so that he could obtain the earliest possible warning of any rumour of a plot or an armada. The differences also continued when one scrutinises the composition of their secretariats. Burghley's secretariat was much more conservative and his secretaries rarely changed throughout his long political career. In contrast, Cecil was much more willing to delegate work amongst his secretaries, especially after 1598, when he began to acquire more and more official posts.

As has been shown there were many differences and similarities between Essex and Cecil's secretariat and intelligence-gathering networks. While it must be pointed out that both men created and managed these two apparatuses successfully, it was the rationale behind the creation of their respective networks that set the two apart. Both men had wanted to use the information that they had gained from their intelligence-gathering network to influence the queen. Essex did not have the bureaucratic training and tutoring that Cecil had received from his father in order to build and manage an effectively working secretariat and intelligence-gathering network. Cecil's secretariat was aimed at eventually becoming the queen's principal secretary, whilst Essex was torn between being an active and successful military commander and also the dominant figure on the privy council, he could not have both. This was exacerbated once Cecil was appointed to the principal secretaryship in 1596, as from then on, with more control of the finances of the state, his intelligence-gathering network and secretariat became much more expansive and proficient. Essex could not hope to match this.

Having said this, Cecil's successes were relatively modest up until 1601, with a number of mistakes and errors pockmarking his earlier years of creating his network. He did, over time, learn and rectify these mistakes and for this he should be given credit. His agents' accurate reading of the Spanish forces that had been intending to land in Ireland would undoubtedly have been useful and contribute to the eventual English victory. By the beginning of James I's reign, Cecil had at his disposal an intelligence-gathering network that was an effective

instrument to guard against the dangers and threats that would face the new Stuart monarchy in the opening decades of the seventeenth century.

## Conclusion

This thesis has shown that there was a continuity of intelligence-gathering in England, which can be seen through the development of Sir Robert Cecil's intelligence-gathering network during the 1590s to the end of Elizabeth's reign in 1603. As has been shown, much of the earlier historiography of Elizabethan espionage has been largely focused upon the 1580s and on Sir Francis Walsingham specifically.<sup>1</sup> Even though there has been a move by historians over the previous few decades and more to shift the focus onto the 1590s more generally, the subject of espionage has been relatively neglected.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, there has been too much focus on Walsingham and too little work done on Sir Robert Cecil, the man who would eventually succeed Walsingham. This thesis has sought to fill this gap and has shown that there was a continuity of espionage practices initiated by Walsingham that Cecil carried forward during the 1590s. This thesis has also shown that more attention needs to be paid to the decades after Walsingham's death to get a more rounded view on how English espionage activities developed and were adapted by individuals such as Cecil. Indeed, it was Cecil who demonstrated that English intelligence networks were still operating effectively, not just in the 1590s, but also into the opening decade of the seventeenth century.

This thesis has also looked at key events in which Cecil and his agents were involved, such as the plots of the early 1590s, the armada scares, the Spanish invasion of Ireland and the Elizabethan succession. By looking at how an individual like Cecil used intelligence gathering, historians can get a clearer understanding of an important tool which was available to the privy council to safeguard the queen's person and the state. This was especially important when

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<sup>1</sup> Robyn Adams, 'A spy on the payroll? William Herle and the mid Elizabethan polity', *HR*, vol. 83, no. 220, 2010, pp. 266-280; John Cooper, *The Queen's Agent, Francis Walsingham at the court of Elizabeth I* (London, 2011); Stephen Alford, *The Watchers, A secret history of the reign of Elizabeth I* (London, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Paul Hammer, 'An Elizabethan spy who came in from the cold: the return of Anthony Standen to England in 1593', *HR*, vol. 65, (1992), pp. 277-295; Paul Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, second earl of Essex* (Cambridge, 1999), esp. chapter 5; Patrick H. Martin, *Elizabethan Espionage: Plotters and Spies in the struggle between Catholicism and the Crown* (North Carolina, 2016).

considering that Elizabethan military forces were at one point fighting on three fronts, in France, the Low Countries and Ireland, not to mention the numerous expeditions sent against the Spanish mainland. Therefore, it was vital that the privy council knew of any threats so that they could be countered effectively with the limited forces at their disposal.

The chapters of this thesis have reflected these points, starting with Cecil's tutelage under his father Lord Burghley from 1590. His involvement with intelligence-gathering began with assisting in the interviewing and subsequent handling of the two captured Jesuit priests, John Snowden alias John Cecil and John Fixer, from May 1591 to June 1592. During this short period he learned of the difficulties in keeping agents on task. For example, the difficulty of obtaining transport to the continent, their fear for their safety, but most of all their complaints about their lack of money. Also at this time Cecil employed men who were tasked with keeping watch on suspected catholic households in and around London, most notably the Cholmeley brothers. The third strand of Cecil's engagement in the intelligence sphere was in exploiting indebted prisoners in London prisons to spy on catholic inmates to report any information they may unwittingly speak of; he was receiving just such information from a Benjamin Beard.

Cecil was then heavily involved in dealing with the various plots against the queen's life during 1593-94, including the interrogation and judicial processes that condemned the participants. The plots were instigated, or were at least believed to have been instigated, by Sir William Stanley and his circle, which included his lieutenant Jacques and the intelligencer Hugh Owen. This belief by the Cecils can be seen in the draft by Burghley and Cecil in which the plots attributed to Richard Hesketh in 1593 and Patrick Cullen are firmly connected to Stanley and his circle.<sup>3</sup> The lasting influence that these plots of 1593-95 had on Cecil was his belief that England's intelligence service, such as it was, had shown itself to be inadequate to deal with the perceived threat coming from the continent. England's enemies were still active and

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<sup>3</sup> A report of the treasons of Patrick Cullen and Richard Hesketh, a<sup>o</sup> 35 Elizabeth, 1594, *HMCS*, 1594-1595, vol. 5, pp. 58-59.

therefore improved intelligence networks would be needed in the future to safeguard the queen and the state.

These plots were followed up a few years later by the launching of armadas by Spain in 1596 and 1597, by which time Cecil had been appointed principal secretary with the power, finance and influence to start building his networks in an official capacity. It was clear from the panicky reports and letters that the privy council received and exchanged with each other that they were caught totally unaware that Spain had launched these attacks. Luckily for them the two armadas were wrecked by storms as they left their ports, forcing the Spanish to abandon their plans to raid England. The episode also meant that Cecil's agents in Spain and in the Bay of Biscay had either failed to inform him of Spain's intentions, or their information arrived too late to be of any use. Thus by the end of 1597 Cecil would have to expand the number of agents in the Iberian peninsula as well as devising new ways to convey agents' reports to himself in London. His main method had been to use merchants ships but this always carried the risk of impounding or adverse weather impairing their effectiveness.

By 1599, indeed until the end of Elizabeth's reign, Cecil's intelligence network scored important successes. In that summer, reports reaching the privy council that Spain was again launching a fresh armada caused alarm and the militia and trained bands were called out and sent to reinforce the south coast alongside the queen's navy. This was despite Cecil's agents, which now covered Lisbon, Ferrol, Bilbao and the coast of the bay of Biscay, reporting that Spain was in fact in no position to launch another armada. In spite of this, Cecil felt that he was not at that point in a strong enough standing to go against the consensus of the rest of the privy council and thus took an active role in the deployment of the militia. In 1601 once again Cecil's agents proved their worth by accurately informing Cecil of the size of the Spanish forces that were to invade Ireland. The Spanish were then holed up in Kinsale and forced to surrender by 2 January 1602 after Mountjoy had smashed Tyrone's relief army. Therefore, Cecil's intelligence gathering had played its part in helping to quell an Irish rebellion that had

been a thorn in the state's side for most of the decade and finally putting to rest Spanish hopes of gaining a foothold in the British Isles.

Lastly, Cecil's agents also provided valuable intelligence on the mindset of the Archduke and Infanta over the succession, as well as providing details of their movements. Thomas Phelippes was also utilised during this period to keep Cecil informed of the progress of the Appellants who had travelled to Rome. It was through Phelippes's reports that Cecil learned that the appellants had caused a rift amongst the Jesuits. This meant that they could not give a coordinated response to a catholic claimant to the throne, thus neutralising a potential threat to James VI's candidacy.

James's early reign has recently been given serious scholarly attention by Susan Doran and Michael Questier<sup>4</sup>. Doran, in particular, has highlighted that the accession of James was not as smooth as had been previously thought, and that there were in fact a number of obstacles and anxieties that James, Cecil and the privy council had to consider. These came in the form of the careful portrayal and wording of his succession so that James would not be seen as an elected monarch; anxiety about the loyalty of the English people and nobles; whether his succession would be accepted by rulers abroad; and the impact of the influx of Scottish nobles given land, titles and offices of state in England.<sup>5</sup> This thesis adds to this by presenting these events from Cecil's perspective. Cecil used the period after James's succession to protect his own position by securing from James a legal document that would enable the deceased Elizabeth's privy council to remain in place whilst he made his way to London, as Cecil knew full well that James would want to appoint some of his own men. Cecil also worked to make sure James' progress to London was unmolested and that the majority of the English people accepted the transition to a Stuart monarchy. Finally, he also began a correspondence with Queen Anne to solicit her support for the future and to entrench himself into the favours of the

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<sup>4</sup> Susan Doran, '1603: a jagged succession', *HR*, vol. 93, no. 261 (August, 2020), pp. 443-465; Questier, *Dynastic politics*, esp. chapter 5.

<sup>5</sup> Doran, 'jagged succession', pp. 444-48, 451-52, 455-61, 464-65.

new royal family. This relationship with James would endure even until the end of Cecil's life, a period when it has been assumed he was in decline, but in fact he was just as influential and favoured as he had been in 1603.<sup>6</sup>

Cecil's own importance and that of his intelligence network only grew once James's reign progressed. Despite the influx of James's chosen Scottish ministers onto the privy council, Cecil remained the leader of the English side of the council. Despite what has been previously suggested, with the advent of the King's bedchamber, Cecil's access to James was not blocked.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, as Eric Lindquist asserts, in the final few years of Cecil's life, despite illness and the seeming rise of potential successors, he still remained an integral part of the early Jacobean administration and in high esteem with the king, his queen and their eldest son Prince Henry.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the episode that Cecil is most famous for is his investigation into the Gunpowder plot of 1605 and the interrogation of some of its instigators, such as Robert Catesby and Guy Fawkes. In his account of this investigation of the Gunpowder plot, Mark Nicholls puts Cecil at the forefront, from the moment Monteagle delivered the letter warning him to stay away from parliament on the appointed day, to the trial and execution of the plotters; his influence is undeniable.<sup>9</sup>

Nicholls also interestingly points out that Cecil's intelligence network failed to notify him of the Gunpowder plot:

We must also rule out of court at this stage of the argument ... that, because we have evidence of governmental manipulation of plots in Elizabethan times, the Gunpowder plot must necessarily have been known to the Cecilian intelligence network ... This attractive argument loses its strength under

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<sup>6</sup> Eric Lindquist, 'The Last Years of the First Earl of Salisbury, 1610-1612', *Albion*, vol. 18, No.1 (Spring, 1986), pp. 23-41, esp. pp. 35-37.

<sup>7</sup> Diana Newton, *The Making of the Jacobean Regime: King James VI and I and the government of England, 1603-1605* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 29-30, 39; Pauline Croft, 'Robert Cecil and the early Jacobean court', in Linda Levy Peck, (ed), *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 143-146.

<sup>8</sup> Eric Lindquist, 'Last Years of the First Earl of Salisbury' pp. 25-28, 31-37.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Nicholls, *Investigating Gunpowder Plot* (Manchester, 1991).



anything more than a passing scrutiny: we have evidence for this involvement in earlier conspiracies, we have precisely nothing worthwhile in the case of Gunpowder plot.<sup>10</sup>

It would be interesting to fully test these assertions, especially as this thesis has shown that Cecil's intelligence network was functioning quite well during the last few years of Elizabeth's reign and had notable successes. Thus it does seem odd that Cecil had heard nothing from his agents about the Gunpowder plot until Monteagle delivered the incriminating letter to him. This, therefore, can be seen as a failure by Cecil and suggests that he may have been a competent intelligencer, but it is difficult to argue that he was as successful as Walsingham had been. In Cecil's defence he arguably had a considerably heavier workload to deal with than Walsingham, as his predecessor always had Burghley to share the burden of administration, allowing Walsingham to concentrate on his intelligence networks.

Another area in need of scholarly attention is that of Jacobean spying. By looking at Cecil's intelligence network as it moved into James' reign, a number of questions arise: to what extent did espionage practices remain stable across the transition from Elizabeth to James's reign? Were the agents used during the last years of Elizabeth's reign kept on or, with England at peace with Spain, was Cecil's intelligence network scaled back? Nicholls mentioned a few agents who were giving Cecil intelligence about potential unlawful catholic activities prior to the exposure of the Gunpowder plot, men such as the secular priest George Southwick, a Richard Udall and the alchemist Henry Wright.<sup>11</sup> They and others deserve to be explored more fully to give a more rounded picture of Cecil's intelligence networks during James's reign, but these topics are outside the scope of this thesis.

There has also been some work done on the growing Jacobean diplomatic service in an article by Maurice Lee Jr in the 1960s. It is clear that Cecil had significant influence in the appointment of England's ambassadors to France, the Low Countries, Italy and, importantly, Spain. Since

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 218.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pp. 217-218.

the majority of these men owed their positions to Cecil, or were trained under him, they would naturally provide him intelligence of any import that occurred within their respective spheres. Men such as John Digby, who was ambassador to Spain for the first time from 1610-1618, managed to construct his own intelligence network within Spain. In April 1613, for example, he reported to the king that it was impossible to corrupt a Spanish councillor but that he had managed to bribe an official of the council of state to give him information.<sup>12</sup>

Even before Digby's appointment, Cecil had asked the English ambassador to France, Thomas Parry, the best way to get letters in and out of the country: could a reliable merchant be found? How did the Spanish ambassador send his messages? Parry told him that the Spanish ambassador did not use French ports and instead used Spain's courier service to the Low Countries, and suggested a couple of merchants who may serve Cecil's purpose.<sup>13</sup> Cecil's preoccupation with Spain is telling; even though both countries had signed the peace treaty of London in 1604, men of Cecil's generation, who had spent the best part of their adult lives at war with the Spaniards, could not completely come to terms with seeing them as allies. Of course these notions need further research to develop any firm hypotheses, but what is clear from these examples is that intelligence-gathering was a preoccupation of men such as Cecil in James's reign, just as it had been in Elizabeth's, and deserves closer study.

This thesis has also discussed the methodology of Cecil's intelligence network and the inspiration that he took from his predecessors, most notably from Sir Francis Walsingham. Two documents have been used to showcase Cecil's intelligence network at a particular time: 'A memorial of intelligencers in several places', dated to 1598, and 'Intelligencers employed this yeare 1601'. These documents not only allow a glimpse of the agents that Cecil had on his payroll but also the similarities when compared with Walsingham's network in the 1580s. One can be in no doubt that many of Walsingham's secretaries and agents found employment under Cecil and this in part may help to explain the increase in success that his intelligence-

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<sup>12</sup> Maurice Lee Jr., 'The Jacobean Diplomatic Service', *American Historical Review*, vol. 72, no. 4 (July 1967), pp. 1264-1282, esp. pp. 1275-76.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1276.

gathering enjoyed. The scope of Cecil's intelligence network and secretariat was different from that of his father. Whereas Burghley was cautious and almost always looked for value for money with his agents, Cecil opted for a more openhanded approach. However, he could be stern with those he employed if he felt that they were cheating him. As with any intelligence network during the early modern period, the quality of intelligence from some agents could be very poor or mostly just hearsay. Cecil was aware of this and it was his habit to question a suspect agent's motives; he would often make his other agents aware of their predecessors' transgressions. This different approach can be explained in part by the fact that England was at war on three fronts as well as in danger of attack from armadas from Spain. Another contributing factor must be again Walsingham's influence, in that his intelligence network had shown that it was better to field a wide range of agents spread out across Europe, with the hope that a few agents would provide useful, even vital, intelligence, and negate those who proved worthless.

It must be noted that with any intelligence network during the early modern period, the system relied heavily on the dedication and willingness of its agents. In this regard, Cecil had his successes and failures, but overall his agents generally provided him with regular informative reports. Giles van Harwick, based in Lisbon, John Cecil, who reported on the seminary Jesuits, Horatio Palavicino and Thomas Honiman, all kept Cecil abreast of what was happening in Europe. Conversely, the recruitment of agents like George Kendall did not prove fruitful, even though Cecil invested much time and effort in getting his secretary Levinus Munck to create a cipher for him as well as instructions for Kendall once he entered the Low Countries. It must be stressed that the recruitment of reliable agents was very much hit and miss.

Unfortunately, we do not have a clear picture how Cecil recruited his agents, whether he was particularly active in seeking out new agents or whether the majority sought him out or were recommended by others. There are, however, examples of Cecil asking the English ambassadors in France and the Low Countries to provide him with useful contacts. Furthermore, his mercantile contacts also forwarded recommendations of individuals who

might prove useful for Cecil. This approach may seem sporadic and decentralised but these are the same ways in which Walsingham recruited his agents during the 1580s. In essence, there was some active recruiting from spy masters such as Walsingham and Cecil but they also relied upon other sources to increase their intelligence networks.

The thesis however has only been able to reconstruct a portion of Cecil's intelligence-gathering network, as the only documents to come down to historians in their fullest form are for the years 1597 and 1601. As mentioned within the introduction, by their very nature the letters written by Cecil's agents were intended to be secret so it is only natural that Cecil or his secretaries would look to dispose of old letters as they saw necessary. Therefore, there may be much of Cecil's network that may remain hidden as, for example, Cecil may have had many more agents within the Iberian peninsula than those agents like Harwick who have left the most prominent paper trail. What this thesis has looked to achieve is to give a good idea of how Cecil's network looked like in terms of structure and methodology from the sources that are available.

Another added factor in the success of an intelligence network was the willingness of the agents to provide useful intelligence and try to achieve the aims that Cecil had set them. This was due to the questionable loyalty of some of his agents, a fact that would have been known to Cecil: many agents would provide information to both sides or the one who paid them the most regularly. Often it depended on what the agent was ordered to do. For example, if they only had to keep watch on shipping and troop numbers, this was an easy and safe role to play. However, if the task involved infiltrating Stanley's circle or a Spanish commander's cortege, this was so dangerous that it may have been easier to go over to the enemy and accept their pay than to continue to work for a master who was far away in London and had no means of extricating you if you were caught. Cecil himself knew of these frustrations, and, in the majority of cases, he tolerated them as long as his agents proved their worth, did not waste the money that he invested in them, or used his name slanderously.

The main aim of this thesis has been to assess Cecil's intelligence network and how it contributed to the protection of the realm. His intelligence network also enabled him to gain influence and power within Elizabeth's court and privy council by portraying himself as the most well informed minister around her and thus helping to safeguard her and the realm. Additionally, his intelligence networks provided an element of continuity in intelligence-gathering activities that, due to the lack of study, previously appeared to stop or be cut back after Walsingham's death in 1590 and not resurrected in any seriousness until John Thurloe's intelligence networks during the Protectorate. Cecil provides evidence of continuity not only in the art of intelligence gathering but also in the continued use of Walsingham's techniques and some of his agents: Cecil can be seen as his willing successor.

The documents 'A list of certain intelligencers', 'A memorial of intelligencers' and 'Intelligencers employed abroad' show that Cecil cared enough about his intelligence networks to ensure that a subordinate knew how to manage his agents in the event of his absence from London. In fact, the money that he invested into his agents show just how much importance Cecil put in relying on intelligencers. His intelligence networks were not always successful but they grew in proficiency over time, in the areas of English foreign policy and home defence, the succession, armada scares and reporting on enemy ship and troop movements. This is an impressive record, since Cecil's intelligence network was privately run, supplemented by his own income and lacking a strong institutional basis. It contrasts strongly, for example, with the Venetian state-run intelligence network, which had an centralised system of conveying intelligence that ran from its ambassadors abroad, through its own secret postal system, to the Council of Ten and to the Doge.<sup>14</sup> Nor did Cecil have the centralised organisation that his successor in espionage John Thurloe built up during the Protectorate in the 1650s and 1660s.

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<sup>14</sup> For an excellent insight into how the Venetian intelligence operated see Ioanna Iordanou, 'What News on the Rialto? The Trade of Information and Early Modern Venice's Centralised Intelligence Organisation', *Intelligence and National Security*, vol. 31, Issue 3, 2016, pp. 305-326. Ioanna Iordanou, *Venice's Secret Service, Organising intelligence in the Renaissance* (Oxford, 2019).

Thurloe had a small army of secretaries, scribes and even departments dedicated to the running of the Protectorate's intelligence network.<sup>15</sup>

Cecil's intelligence network was run by a small number of secretaries to assist him, mainly Levinus Munck, Simon Willis and, later, Thomas Wilson. His networks were funded from the wealth that he gained from his many offices and he ran and read the reports from his houses either on the Strand or at Theobalds. This ad hoc style of managing the information he received was again in the same vein as Walsingham, who organised and ordered his agents' reports in his country and London houses, such as Barn Elms, under a small, close knit staff. Overall, this thesis has shown that Sir Robert Cecil's intelligence network was an important and integral part of safeguarding the realm during the last decade of Elizabeth's reign. Its growth was a gradual process which steadily increased after Cecil obtained the principal secretaryship and its success rate improved thereafter. Cecil's methods drew upon those of Walsingham, utilising some of his old contacts but also contacts that he recruited himself. These included merchants, soldiers fighting in the Spanish Netherlands, Jesuit priests, catholic emigres, secretaries, protestants, catholics, chancers and those rare few who were committed either to Cecil by patronage, or to safeguard English shores from invasion and intrigue.

Sir Robert Cecil's intelligence network would continue to constitute an important part of his usefulness to the queen and to her successor James I. James's accession by no means meant that Cecil's agents were now redundant, as there were still those looking to undermine the fledgling Jacobean state both from within and without. It was mainly up to Cecil to keep a watchful eye on events and to use the experiences and agents that he had built up during Elizabeth's reign to safeguard England at the start of an uncertain new era.

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<sup>15</sup> For more information on Thurloe's intelligence network see Thomas Birch, *A collection of state papers of John Thurloe ... Containing authentic memorials of the English affairs from the year of 1638 to the restoration of King Charles II* (7 vols, London, 1742); C.H. Firth, 'Thurloe and the Post Office', *EHR*, vol. 13, No. 51 (July 1898), pp. 527-533; Timothy Noel Peacock, 'Cromwell's "spymaster"? John Thurloe and rethinking early modern intelligence', *The Seventeenth Century Journal* (November 2018), pp. 3-30.

Appendix: Tables of Cecil's Agents and Secretarial Staff

Cecil's intelligence-gathering secretaries and informal staff

Name	Aliases	Occupation	Years of Service	Chapters they are mentioned in
Levinus Munck	N/A	Secretary covering papers regarding foreign news and intelligence reports. Also wrote out instructions and ciphers for Cecil's agents	1596-1612	4,6,7
Thomas Phelippes	John Morice, Peter Halins/ Haylyns, Mr Robinson	Worked for Walsingham, Essex and Cecil. Initially applied to become part of Burghley's intelligence network but was rejected; reason unknown. Skilled cryptographer and arguably Elizabethan England's most experience spy master with a range of contacts in France and the Low Countries.	1600-1605	2,3,5,6,7
William Waad	N/A	Worked for Burghley and Cecil but also had corresponded with Essex and other privy councillors. Diplomat, skilled clerk, helped with the interrogations during the plots of 1593-95.	Worked for Burghley from early 1570s still working for James' government but lost his position after the death of Cecil. Stripped of his positions in 1613.	2, 7

Thomas Willis	N/A	Secretary covering intelligence reports. Dismissed in 1602 by Cecil as he mistrusted his loyalty over the secret correspondence with James VI.	1596-1602	4, 5, 7
Thomas Wilson	N/A	Took over from Willis as the second of Cecil's intelligence gathering secretaries. Also acted as an agent to Venice.	1602-09	4, 7



## Cecil's agents

Name	Aliases	Occupations	Years of activity	Where they were based	Mentioned in chapters
Roger Aston	N/A	Agent worked for Leicester, Walsingham, Burghly and Cecil, Message carrier	1580-1603	Scotland	7
John Barcroft	N/A	Jesuit/ Informer	1591-1592	Rome, Italy	2
Francis Bolton	N/A	Agent worked for Walsingham and Cecil	1580-1597	Seville, Spain	7
John Cecil	John Snowden	Jesuit/ Agent, worked for Burghley and Cecil	1591-1594	Spain, Italy, Scotland	2, 3
Richard Cholmeley	N/A	Worked for Walsingham and Cecil. Informed on suspected catholics and monitored them	1591-92 (For Cecil)	London, southern England	2
Sir Charles Danvers	N/A	Scholar/ Soldier and agent working for Cecil	1594-1598	Venice, Italy	7
Thomas Douglas	N/A	Agent worked for Cecil	1601-1602	Agent in Archduke's camp, Scotland, Ireland	6, 7
Thomas Honeyman	Honiman	Merchant, ship-carried messages and payment to Cecil's agents	1594-1603	Bay of Biscay	4, 5, 6, 7
Andrew Hunter	N/A	Agent worked for Cecil/ Jesuit priest	1598	Campagna/ Italy	7
George Kendall	N/A	Ex-soldier of Sir William Stanley's regiment/ Agent.	1600-1602	Dunkirk, Brussels, Low Countries	6
Richard Langton	N/A	Agent, Informer, worked for Cecil	1596-1597	Calais, France	7
Francis Lombard	N/A	Agent worked for Cecil	1599	Bayonne, Ferrol, A Coruña, Bilbo, Bay of Biscay	5
Henry Lok	N/A	Poet, Agent worked for Cecil	1599-1600	Bayonne, Ferrol, A Coruña,	5

				Bilbo, Bay of Biscay.	
Andreas Martiningo	N/A	Agent worked for Cecil	1596-1597	Flanders, Low Countries	7
Michael Moody	John Welles, John Bristowe, Bar. Richie, M.M.	Agent worked for Walsingham, Burghley and Cecil	1587-1596	Low Countries	2
Mr More	N/A	Agent worked for Cecil	1597	Lisbon, Portugal	7
Francis Mowbray	N/A	Agent worked for Cecil	1601-1602	Scotland	6, 7
Mr Muchecon	N/A	Agent worked for Cecil	1597	Lisbon	7
George Nicolson	The Pigeon	Agent worked for Cecil. Also unwittingly carried the secret letters between Cecil and James VI.	1596-1604	Scotland	6, 7
William Sterrell	Henry Saint Martin, Francquelin, Robert Robinson, Jonnes, Thomas Barnes	Agent worked for Thomas Phelippes who in turn worked for Cecil from 1600.	1586-1608	Paris, France, Brussels, Dunkirk, Low Countries	2, 6
Sir Horatio Palavicino	N/A	Merchant and intelligencer with his own agents. Worked for Walsingham, Burghley and Cecil.	1580-1599	London, Low Countries, Italy	4,5, 7
Robert Poley	N/A	Agent worked for Walsingham, Burghley and Cecil	1585-1596	Brussels, Dunkirk, Low Countries	2
William Resolde	Giles Van Harwick	Agent/ Merchant worked for Cecil	1597-1602	Lisbon	4, 5, 6, 7.
John Ricroft	N/A	Michael Moody's handler	1591	London	2
Paul Theobaste	Teobast	Agent worked for Cecil, recommended by Palavicino	1597-1598	Lisbon	5, 7
Massentio Verdiani	Verdiano	Merchant/Agent worked for Cecil. Recommended by Palavicino	1597-1598	Brussels, Seville	7
George Weekes	N/A	Ex-soldier of Sir William Stanley's regiment.	1601	Dunkirk, Brussels, Low Countries	6

Thomas Wilson	John Fixer	Jesuit/Agent, worked for Burghley and Cecil	1591	Rome	2
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